

# **Picabia: The Forgotten Artist in America**

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**Matthew Tyler Ramirez**

An ephemeral event can influence generation after generation, but as time passes, history begins to record itself with less and less detail. February 17, 1913, is often marked as the date where the American art world was revolutionized—the International Exhibition of Modern Art, also known as the Armory Show. However, what if it was actually one day prior? *The New York Times* published an article on February 16, 1913 entitled, “Picabia, Art Rebel, Here to Teach New Movement.” The opening line states “to have outfutured the Futurists, to have outcubed the Cubists—that is the achievement of Picabia, the latest ‘Thing’ in modern French art” and included five paintings by Francis Picabia. How did an artist begin to get written out of a historical event when he was the one forming a link between the European and American movements? How does one person overshadow the other? How are artists’ works viewed in different cultures and how did language play a role in this transnational event?

This essay hopes to reinvigorate the importance of Picabia to the historical event and speak to the complexity of an artist’s divided feelings about a culture he believed was dying and a culture he believed was the future.

Oxford University Press states in its 2004 edition that “Duchamp was the most influential of all exponents of Dada and Picabia was the most vigorous in promoting its ideas, forming a link between the European and American movements.”<sup>1</sup> However, Picabia did not speak English, he is even said to have “disdained learning english”<sup>2</sup>, but yet considered the ‘great connector.’ However, as Art Historian Jan Thompson describes, Picabia’s work may have been “more straightforward and more directly understandable to American observers,”<sup>3</sup> and thus continuing in his dadaist works the years following Picabia shared his creed that he had for his dadaist magazine, which Historian Peter Gay recounts about Picabia’s influenced time spent in the United States:

“Every page must explode, whether through seriousness, profundity, turbulence, nausea, the new, the eternal, annihilating nonsense, enthusiasm from principles, or the way it is printed. Art must be unaesthetic in the extreme, useless and impossible to justify.”<sup>4</sup>

I believe that as history is written, and is translated to new languages, transplanted across borders, and traversed across perspectives in all directions, the truth and the reality of what happened can become lost. Thus with this essay, I hope to expose the different historical perspectives of Francis Picabia through his fundamental works and how viewpoints have changed over the years of what Picabia was actually trying to communicate to English and French speakers; all while speaking generally

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<sup>1</sup> Chilvers, Ian. "Dada." In *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*. : Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198604761.001.0001/acref-9780198604761-e-959>

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, Jan, “Picabia and His Influence on American Art”, 1913-17, *College Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1952), p 14-21

<sup>3</sup> Thompson, Jan, “Picabia and His Influence on American Art”, 1913-17, *College Art Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Autumn, 1952), p.16

<sup>4</sup> Gay, Peter, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 143

about the importance and difficulty of scholastic research. Additionally, I will explore Francis Picabia's introduction and exploration of American culture with his first interactions with the Armory Show of 1913. Furthermore, I will discuss Picabia's indispensable opinion about art and different North American interpretations of his work leading up to and including his 391 dadaist magazine in order to show the importance of the artist and his work to American culture during the early 20th century.

In summation this essay will address why Picabia has taken a back seat in the public eye in the United States. I hope to reinvigorate his vital importance to America's history while critically looking at his artistic merit and the possible reasons he has fallen out of stardom, whereas Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, George Braque, Paul Cézanne, and Edgar Degas are all recognizable artists to the general American public.

Prominent American historian Peter Gay wrote about Francis Picabia in his book entitled Modernism: The Lure of Heresy (2008) where he discusses the Dadaist movement in relation to World War One (WWI) in Europe. He states that "the absolutists, like the inventive Spanish painter Francis Picabia" wanted to reinvigorate the arts and cites the famous quote about his magazine as shared in the first paragraph.<sup>5</sup> Gay records Picabia as a Spanish artist, but France has most certainly claimed him as their own, because he was born in France to an immigrant Cuban father who had lived in Spain for some time and a French mother. He is French. For such a leading American historian today to make not just a simple misinterpretation or a minor oversight, but a grave mistake, causes one to worry and question the validity of Gay's

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<sup>5</sup> Gay, Peter, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 143

work; by labeling an artist by the inaccurate origin, catalyzes and helps foster poor interpretations of an artist's artwork. Peter Gay was made the NYC Public Library's founding director for a new scholarly humanities center to "foster innovative thinking about society,"<sup>6</sup> causing concern to the United States (U.S.) about how America's history is being influenced and written by historians like Peter Gay. As one develops a conceptual understanding of Picabia, it is important for one to be conscious that he used his personal life for his work; interpretations of an artist's work must be drawn from their direct environment and what is actually on the canvas. Why are Picabia's origins so critical to his artwork?

Picabia, being French, loved to play with words as much as any French speaker does because of the language having many *homonymes* (homophone), when words have the exact same pronunciation but spelled differently and have different meanings, and as well as working with many words that have double meanings just as in English. It is the key element to his 'dadaist' works that he began creating after the Armory Show of 1913. In addition, his relation to WWI was from a French perspective. He was surrounded in France by the constant imagery of its involvement in the war, whereas Spain remained neutral during this period and thus if Picabia was "Spanish" as Peter Gay describes; historians might not regard his work with: relation to WWI, with regards to the fully understanding the subtleties of word play in French, and possibly regard him with closer relations to the Spanish avant-garde who were living in Paris around the same time. Having established Francis Picabia as a French man, how would America come to influence this French individual and vice-versa?

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, Judith, "N.Y. Public Library picks founding director of \$15 million humanities center", New York Times News Service, (Aug. 11, 1997), 143

The infamous Armory Show of 1913 in which Picabia participated in was originally titled the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*. It was organized by the *Association of American Painters and Sculptors*, these Americans wanted to have an opportunity, where there was little to none at all possible, “for the public at large to become acquainted with new works of art, American or European.”<sup>7</sup> Claiming Picabia as the ‘great connector’ does not seem surprising because he was the only foreign artist to make the voyage to America for the exhibition, thus putting him directly in the limelight representing the European Art movement at the time to the American public.

However, the painting the general American public attributes to the Armory show of 1913 is the *Nude Descending the Staircase No 2* (1912). This is evident as the National Public Radio (NPR) broadcast shared for the 100th anniversary of the New York Armory Show on November 11, 2013. Picabia is not mentioned once in the broadcast or in the article.<sup>8</sup> However, NPR does mention how the European artists won out in the press over the American’s despite half the art being American. The Europeans did not just “[get] the most publicity, but they outsold the Americans more than two-to-one. A mere 51 works by native artists were sold, compared with 125 pieces from abroad.”<sup>9</sup> However, for the 50-year-anniversary in 1963, a review by the famous Art Historian, Frank Anderson Trapp had a different view on the show and states “that although Cubism was hardly ignored, it was primarily represented by those who have turned out to be minor or peripheral figures. Picabia and Duchamp assumed stellar

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<sup>7</sup> Trapp, Frank Anderson, *The Armory Show: A Review*, Art Journal, Vol. 23, No. 1 ( College Art Association, Autumn, 1963),p. 2

<sup>8</sup> Stamberg, Susan, “In 1913, A New York Armory Filled with Art Stunned The Nation,” NPR (Nov. 11, 2013)

<sup>9</sup> Trapp, Frank Anderson, *The Armory Show: A Review*, Art Journal, Vol. 23, No. 1 ( College Art Association, Autumn, 1963), p 4

importance. Picasso, Braque, and Léger were little evident. . .”<sup>10</sup> ; Trapp doesn’t explain why Picabia became a minor character with Cubism in 1963 and his continuation to spiral out of the historical event, but does mention him. However, it could it be partially due to his dadaist work that would soon follow and change his image in the spotlight.

One day prior to the Armory Show 1913 and in reference to the exhibition, *The New York Times* article was published on February 16, 1913, with the title of “Picabia, Art Rebel, Here to Teach New Movement.” The opening line states “to have outfutured the Futurists, to have outcubed the Cubists— that is the achievement of Picabia, the latest ‘Thing’ in modern French art” and included five paintings by Picabia.<sup>11</sup> New York was introduced with an entire article about the history of Picabia and his opinion of what he was witnessing in New York City. Picabia claims in the interview with *The New York Times* that he is above the impressionists and the cubists because he painted the “rush of upward movement” and the “feeling of those who attempted to build the Tower of Babel—man’s desire to reach the heavens, to achieve Infinity” in reference to the skyscrapers that filled New York City.<sup>12</sup> Picabia might be seen as arrogant in the article but if we regard his painting *La Danse à la Source* (1912), which was included in the exhibition, we are able to witness the complexity and the achievements as to why we should still view this work with the highest regards in cubism and not leave him out of the conversation.

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<sup>10</sup> Trapp, Frank Anderson, *The Armory Show: A Review*, Art Journal, Vol. 23, No. 1 ( College Art Association, Autumn, 1963, p 6

<sup>11</sup> *The New York Times*, **Feb 16**, 1913, sect 5, p.9

<sup>12</sup> *The New York Times*, **Feb 16**, 1913, sect 5, p.9

Comparing Picasso's *The Aficionado* (1912) with Picabia's *La Danse à la Source* (1912), allows one to witness why his work achieved possibly something greater.

Picabia gave a prime example of how the cubists were at large not truly radical but the "same as that of the old masters."<sup>13</sup> ; he states that:

"Take their portraits. There you will find an eye— the eye of the person painted. And if [cubists artists] make that eye diamond-shaped —with angles, in cubes — instead of a round orb, what does it matter? The essential idea is the same."

One is able to make out a few things such as the lips, a mustache, and an eye of the man in the fractured cubist portrait by Picasso. He extinguishes the possibility of there being perspective by eliminating volume and utilizing planar fields. In the planes he doesn't allow the monochromatic colors to be logical for expressing where the light is coming from, but uses light as a detail to highlight different aspects of possible moving pieces in the portrait. This is similar to the idea of leaving a camera shutter open with multiple filters to alter and witness the different movements that could have occurred if he was taking a photo rather than painting a man. Yet, Picabia goes beyond as he describes simply using straight horizontal cubes and rectangles to create the movement and fractured space. He breaks the unwritten rules that keep the cubists back; even beyond the bounds of the tubular shapes of Fernand Léger, but utilizes odd shapes to create emotion rather than just a real life image. At first glance, the heads of the dancers make the painting seem simple because of the high contrast with the pinks and browns creating volume by fracturing the face with different values, however when one moves down to their torsos and legs, Picabia confuses the viewer. Are there actually three dancers? Looking at the hands it appears possible that a third hand is coming

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<sup>13</sup> *The New York Times*, Feb 16, 1913, sect 5, p.9

from the left of the painting from the body of a third individual, or is it the handle of a water pump since they are at the “spring?” The ambiguity stimulates the idea how dancers morph their bodies to express emotions and become objects. Additionally, regarding their legs and feet, they appear to be intimately entangled, but after observing and contemplating the painting, the viewer is able to note that they might actually be moving rather than just standing stationary. The high values and texturizing with the paint causes the eyes to bounce back and forth creating rhythm in the painting, while divulging the narration of a three dimensional dance that is happening between different planes of the painting. If the viewer squint their eyes it is incredibly simple to see the dancers because of the varying values and allowing the whites to pop out. Thus, Picabia allows his monochromatic colors to not simply highlight aspects but to allow light to play a role in addition to fracturing the space into multiple planes by eliminating and retaining perspective simultaneously; he provides emotion through his interpretation rather than just formal techniques. Furthermore, in 1914 art critic Jerome Eddy compared Picasso’s style of Cubism to Picabia’s: “the theory is so abstract and so scientific it comes near paralyzing the art. It is *too coldly logical* and unemotional to produce great art, for great art is and must be fundamentally *emotional*,”<sup>14</sup> in reference to Picasso.

It will come as no surprise than that Jerome Eddy bought Picabia’s painting, *La Danse à la Source* (1912), and soon published Cubists and Post-Impressionism in 1914 in which he discusses: theories and Picabia’s artwork; ultimately keeping Picabia in the

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<sup>14</sup> Eddy, Jerome, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, (Publisher) 1914, p. 95



press.<sup>15</sup> Eddy in his book quotes Picabia several times and discusses Picabia's public discussions about Art during his visit in the United States. During a New York Tribune interview recounted by Eddy, Picabia stated that:

“Your New York is the cubist, the futurist city. It expresses its architecture, its life, its spirit, and the modern. . .I do not paint these things which my eye sees. I paint that which my brain, my soul, sees. My brain gets the impression of each movement. . . [the people's] breathless haste to reach the place of their work in the morning and their equal hast to reach their home at night.”<sup>16</sup>

He was inspired to paint what he was experiencing in New York City. In his painting *Udnie* (1913) he captures exactly what he describes and is arguably the first artist to exhibit New York City in this fashion. His foreigner eyes allowed him to be more conscious of the eminence inspiring environment and thus aiding the people of the United States to truly understand how phenomenal and different New York City was from Europe. In the painting, the easiest buildings for a viewers eyes to grasp is the two blue apartments with a few randomly assorted visible windows presumably illuminated because its residents are awake, whereas the other windows are not depicted because their residents are sleeping or the rooms are unoccupied, and thus have their lights off. It appears Picabia switches the perspective throughout the painting by having his audience see the tops of green trees, to the bridges and bodies of water surrounding the island of New York City with the night sky; ultimately creating the excitement and commotion of New York City. The piece evokes the inner-workings and movements of the city as a dance because of the swirling shapes that wind on the canvas. Additionally, the title *Udnie* (1913) would be used again in a piece *I See Again in Memory My Dear*

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<sup>15</sup> Thompson, Jan, “Picabia and His Influence on American Art”, 1913-17, College Art Journal, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Autumn, 1979),14-21

<sup>16</sup> Eddy, Jerome, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, (Publisher) 1914, p. 95

*Udnie (Je revois en souvenir ma chère Udnie)* (1914) that the Museum of Modern Art explains how Picabia was inspired in this 1914 painting by Napierkowska, who was a polish dancer on the steamship that brought him from Europe to New York in 1913.<sup>17</sup> There was no other artist at the time who had captured New York like Picabia arguably until he inspired them with his artworks.

Italian-American artist Joseph Stella had participated in the Armory Show but did not rise to fame until he would paint *Battle of Lights, Coney Island, Mardi Gras* (1913-1914).<sup>18</sup> It is in the Futurist vein with no flat planes, but swirly ribbons and overwhelming lights, carousels, roller coasters, etc, that seem to embody the same emotionally driven paintings of the city by Picabia with catalyzing the audience to feel the rush of the amusement park as if you were standing in the midst of it all, overwhelmed like a four year old experiencing it for the first time. It is probable that Stella then was influenced by Picabia because of his stardom in the press and his new take on cubism that was roaring about in New York City— that no artist could have missed hearing about at the time.

Picabia's *La Danse à la Source* (1912) would continue with the Armory Show exhibition in 1913 to The Art Institute of Chicago. The very first museum, not just a gallery, in America to hold an exhibition with these 'radicals.' And its first Director, William M. R. French, was unsure if he should bring the show to Chicago because of its possible influence on those at the Institute's school and how it would be received in Chicago where there was publicly not a lot of news of the most recent developments in

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<sup>17</sup> *I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie*, *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925* (Gallery Label Text), MoMa, [http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=78348](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=78348) (Accessed Nov. 25, 2013)

<sup>18</sup> Shoemaker, Innis Howe, *Adventures in Modern Art: The C. K. Williams II Collection* (2009), pp. 274-277 <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/biography/15702.html>

the European Art world.<sup>19</sup> After French had visited the exhibition in NYC he stated in a letter to his European traveling friend who helped bring the show to America about the European artists, “Duchamp and Picabia: The wildest of the cubists. Humbugs– not incapable.”<sup>20</sup> In 1913, these two artists were named together as ‘humbugs’ or deceivers that were not unable to paint, and they were named *together*. William French, well accomplished and seasoned art critic and director, did not totally disregard these two artists possibly because he saw them as truly revolutionary, that they accomplished something of a new aesthetic. How then did Picabia become such a minor character, whereas Duchamp is mentioned in today's headlines? *The New York Times* of the Armory's 100th anniversary, Picabia is mentioned but his works go unnamed, whereas once again Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912) receives mention and its radical nature for the era is reiterated once again.<sup>21</sup> One possible reason why Picabia has been overshadowed is fact that “nude” is not in the title. Picabia's work is entirely radical in a separate way as described earlier. Duchamp focuses on the nude as if it were a film study video of movement on a canvas, whereas Picabia used his nudes as players in his image to communicate emotion rather than simply motion.

During Picabia's visit to New York, he met Marius de Zayas in 1913, who would play a vital role in influencing him; and vice-versa into Picabia's next stage after cubism and into dadaism.<sup>22</sup> By looking at *De Zayas! De Zayas!* from 291, (July-August, 1915) it

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<sup>19</sup> Martinez, Andrew, “A Mixed Reception for Modernism: The 1913 Armory Show at the Art Institute of Chicago”, *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, One Hundred Years at the Art Institute: A Centennial Celebration (1993), p. 31

<sup>20</sup> French to Hutchinson, Feb. 22, 1913, French - Exhibition Correspondence, 1912-14

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, Ken, “Reliving the Show That ‘Dropped like a Bomb,’” Oct. 10, 2013

<sup>22</sup> Bohn, Willard, “The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas,” *The Art Bulletin*, 1980, Vol.62(3), p.434

becomes obvious how this satirical piece should be regarded as his new dadaist technique in the way he plays with an already existing image to alter it for his own use. The schematic diagram of an automobile's electrical system illustrates his friend as a seducing machine that is coin operated by the slot at the top center to get his engine started to electrify a mechanized woman in her corset. The line connecting the tire valve, does emphasis the "pneumatic bliss" Willard Bohn explains, but the object is more than just a tire valve, it is acting like a microscope's eyepiece with the words near by, translating at best to "I've seen you in action, and this is certainly you!"<sup>23</sup> Bohn accurately assesses what is expressed with the painting but states that Picabia had "a tortuous journey through war-torn France and across the ocean. . ." and "finally found refuge in New York with his old friends," as he re-expresses De Zayas deceleration in the *291* magazine that inspired *391*.<sup>24</sup> However, Bohn makes Picabia out to be a hapless soul, when in actuality he deserted from the war and abandoned France. Picabia avoided fighting in WWI with the help of his wife, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, who aided him in getting a job as a chauffeur to a general in the provisional French capital in Bordeaux, and then received a mission to get sugar from Cuba for France.<sup>25</sup> On route to Cuba, Picabia's trip was detoured in New York.

Picabia's wife played an important role in the history of the artist because she was the one who was translating for him because he did not speak English. However, when we look at history about his work during this time period of 1912-1918, there is not

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<sup>23</sup> Bohn, Willard, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," *The Art Bulletin*, 1980, Vol.62(3), p. 449

<sup>24</sup> Bohn, Willard, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," *The Art Bulletin*, 1980, Vol.62(3), p.449

<sup>25</sup> Jones, A. (2002), *Equivocal Masculinity: New York Dada in the context of World War I*. *Art History*, 25, p.174

a lot mentioned about his wife, if at all, despite her active involvement in giving Picabia a voice. She should be seen as the 'great connector' or at least we should view them as a duo, because as anyone knows when attempting to translate ideas and thoughts, it is impossible to translate word for word, as the meaning can be lost, it is up to the translator how something should be culturally communicated. His interviews were possible with New York newspapers due to Gabrielle and her translating skills. In turn, Picabia's work during this time was not just about the artwork, but what he was saying about the artwork to the public with his wife's help. He implanted ideas about how to view the modern art movement that was flowing in from Europe to the United States; yet he often bears the heavy shadows of Duchamp and Man Ray most likely in the U.S. because his work relied on language in a field where imagery often wins the day.

If we are to look at his work after coming to the U.S. since the war had broken out in 1914, we witness his French perspective, and the complex relationship he had with the United States. His wife recounted how Picabia's self-induced nervous breakdowns, due to the sex, jazz, and alcohol, guarded him from a court martial because of his blatant disregard for his duty to his country.<sup>26</sup> Nancy Ring in her 1991 essay <sup>27</sup> discusses how WWI affected the New York Dada collective and provides a different interpretation of how Picabia's female machines acted as "masculine anxiety *vis-à-vis* the development of industrial capitalism, the power of the machine, and the rise of New Women with the liberated sex roles. . ." <sup>28</sup> that are evident in his work. The

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<sup>26</sup> Jones, A. (2002), *Equivocal Masculinity: New York Dada in the context of World War I*. *Art History*, 25, p. 174

<sup>27</sup> Ring, Nancy, "New York Dada and the Crisis of Masculinity: Man Ray, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp in the US, 1913-1921", (1991)

<sup>28</sup> Ring, Nancy, "New York Dada and the Crisis of Masculinity: Man Ray, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp in the US, 1913-1921", (1991), p. 179

masculine anxiety may give reason for a majority of his machines relying upon sex in order for the artist to attempt to forget about the war happening in Europe. Picabia and the rest of the dadaist artists in NYC were not fighting in the war and at the time were regarded in Europe with a lack of masculinity.<sup>29</sup> However, Picabia was not simply just a “wounded man,” as Ring describes, projecting his masculinity onto his female machines, but just honestly fascinated by the machine and chose the woman as his subject because he had a certain respect for the liberated woman that he enjoyed interacting with. Nevertheless, the new machines represented the new world of America to him but additionally the old world of Europe due to the fighting taking place across the land.

In turn, he wielded his images during the war to comment on the absurdity of the industrialization involving the war but did so indirectly because of his love-hate relationship with the advancements of the world. If we look at his *Portrait de Marie Laurencin* (1916-1917), it is possible to see further his development of the machine in his work. Picabia stated, “Almost immediately upon coming to America it flashed on me that the genius of the modern world is machinery, and that through machinery, art ought to find a most vivid expression,”<sup>30</sup> but the machine is what caused him to leave France, is it not? WWI represented a time when millions of people were dying in the trenches, bombs were being dropped in Paris, and by 1915 the Germans had successfully used poison gas in the war, which was all due to the advancements of the ‘machine’ which

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<sup>29</sup> Ring, Nancy, “New York Dada and the Crisis of Masculinity: Man Ray, Francis Picabia, and Marcel Duchamp in the US, 1913-1921”, (1991), p. 168

<sup>30</sup> New York Tribune (24th October 1915), section IV, p2

Picabia said inspired him but also drove him arguably to nervous breakdowns.<sup>31</sup> In the portrait we see the interior of a car in which he altered a common mass produced image in order to change its meaning ironically by placing words around it that expressed humanities resemblance of being perhaps no different than machines that produce expected results. The historian Marie Caudill Dennison expresses her supposed 'superior' eye by stating "how this work has received, attention from scholars, but none has made the connection between the English inscription 'Four in Hand' and the automobile subject matter," while going into detail about how it supposedly deals with how the original phrase referring to horses reins developed and was used in the same manner with cars during 1916, because cars had four gears.<sup>32</sup> I propose that this historian is projecting onto the past, and he is not referencing about the cars in this manner because Ford's Model T was a 'three-gear': reverse, and two forward speeds and were the major car sold in the United States in 1917 as the affordable car for everyone.<sup>33</sup> I propose that Picabia was simply making a reference to the car resembling how horses helped man get from point *a* to point *b*, nothing more. The drawing represents his infidelity with his French lover who was married to a "boche" (a derogatory name for Germans) in the painting, who they fooled around under his nose in Barcelona.

Dadaism in general was commenting on the absurdity of society in the confined system by shocking people back into their senses with the extreme. This dadaist piece

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<sup>31</sup> Timeline, National World War 1 Musuem, <http://theworldwar.org/explore/interactive-wwi-timeline>

<sup>32</sup> Dennison, Mariea Caudill, Automobile Parts and Accessories in Picabia's Machinist Works of 1915-17, The Burlington Magazine , Vol. 143, No. 1178 (May, 2001), pp. 279

<sup>33</sup> "Model T", History, A&E Television Networks, <http://www.history.com/topics/model-t> (accessed Oct 2013)

is representative of how he considered himself as the one ironically throwing a wrench in the system, aka the machine of society, because of his absurd signature. During this era, he often used *Fidèle-Coco*; translating to the 'loyal bloke.'

In French, there are three tenses for formality depending on how formal and how informal one is wanting to be: *soutenu*, *courant*, and *familier*; by using the informal tense he is easily communicating to French speakers that he's kidding and if he wanted to be taken seriously he would have used the most formal tense. Picabia was accurate in the fact that he was separating himself from the modernist movement because he didn't rely on sentiment of nostalgia as historian Roger Rothman explains and is possibly better described as anti-modern.<sup>34</sup>

Picabia relied on the future and the machines that made it up, whereas Picasso, Matisse, and Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912) accurately do rely upon the nude, and in general rely on the history of Art's common images. Picabia found the images of the present era that he was a part of and manipulated them as ready-mades. Arguably Picabia was not simply showing how man was like the machines but asking his audience to avoid becoming predictable beings that lacked individual thought and lacked creativity.

As WWI continued, Picabia returned to Europe, but specifically to Spain, where he would begin his 391 dadaist magazine. He would return to New York City and create 3 magazines while in the U.S. In each American cover of 391, Picabia plays with images he's reproduced by adding words that add a new meaning to it and could possibly be attributed for inspiring the biggest art

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<sup>34</sup> Rothman, Roger. "Modernist Melancholy and Francis Picabia after 1912, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, USA, Feb 2009



movement of America. This movement would become to be known as Pop Art. Similar to Picabia's artistic style, Andy Warhol would create similar reproductions with more iconic reproduced images of Campbell soup cans and Marilyn Monroe that were representative images of American culture and still are today. Now reflecting upon the idea of Picabia's influence on Pop Art, I will now explain how his American covers are representative of this idea.

The first cover in New York was for the fifth issue of June 1917. The cover is simply of a propeller for a boat. Below the object, Picabia has written *âne*, which is the French word for donkey or fool. It makes sense why Michel Sanouillet, a French historian describes the image as such:

*"Il s'agit d'une hélice de bateau, dans laquelle on peut avec un généreux effort d'imagination, retrouver une tête d'âne, les oreilles étant figurées par les deux pales supérieures et le museau par la pale inférieure."*<sup>35</sup>

He doesn't allude to the idea that donkey in English is also called an 'ass,' but states in French with 'generous effort you can make out the head and ears of the donkey in the figure.' More than likely Picabia understood the 'play with words' because the propeller is at the end of the boat and could assumably be jokingly called the 'ass.' Additionally, the image seems logical for him to use a propeller to announce that he had come back to the United States by boat. Furthermore, boats were highly important to WWI at this time and to America because of how many soldiers were being drafted just after President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. Since Picabia would have been well aware of this it doesn't seem absurd to make a claim that he was stating that sending troops to a massacre in Europe was 'foolish' via boats.

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<sup>35</sup>Sanouillet, Michel, *Francis Picabia et 391*, Vol 2, E. Losfeld, 1966, p. 71

In the following month of July he published the sixth edition. The cover, designed by Picabia, is a lightbulb image he saw in a catalogue and inscribed the words 'flirt' and 'divorce'. Picabia was explaining how the American women were liberated and entering bars by themselves or without men by their side as NPR had explained about the era in general of American artists during 1913 and the following years.<sup>36</sup> I would claim that he was also dealing with the fact of the imagery around the 'machine,' in general, that had been all over Europe, as was all as in New York City at the time because of the posters that filled the streets to support the troops and the war effort with boats, guns, etc. If we look at the WWI Poster: *Light consumes coal - Save light, save coal United States Fuel Administration (1917)*<sup>37</sup>, we notice a similar approach of how his magazine cover was simplistic and in the same manner as this posters, like many during WWI. In the French language to 'light up' is *allumer*, making sense why Sanouillet employs *allumeuse* (a seductive woman or a tease) to describe what Picabia was trying to represent with the sexualized lightbulb. However, he was arguably romanticizing America just as the mainstream advertisements for the war effort were doing, but flipping it. Picabia does indeed make reference to Agnes Ernst Meyer, the American tease who reignited the Dadaist group in 1915, but also I propose that it should be discussed in relation with the imagery of objects in advertisements sold at the time.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps, Picabia wanted to expose that art is simply about expression, simply using the world around you in order to cause a second glance rather than recreate an image that had become mechanized

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<sup>36</sup> Stamberg, Susan, "In 1913, A New York Armory Filled with Art Stunned The Nation," NPR (Nov. 11, 2013)

<sup>37</sup> *Coles Phillips ; Wards & Deutsch Litho. Co. Chicago., Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., 1917, Call Number: POS - US .P552, no. 1 (C size) [P&P]*

<sup>38</sup> Bohn, Willard, "The Abstract Vision of Marius de Zayas," *The Art Bulletin*, 1980, Vol.62(3), p.499

work for the artist of the 20th century who relied on structure. When art is confined by rules and guidelines, it no longer holds emotions. The emotion is what Picabia never lost in his works of art after he became involved in cubism, despite his diverse career in art.

In conclusion, Picabia was the great connector, he did not do it alone, but he is arguably at the soul of the great transition from the art hub of Europe in Paris to the new art hub in New York City. Picabia's work is not as familiar with the American public at large and yet arguably it makes up part of the main foundation of what would become known as the Pop Art movement and Post-modern movement in the United States. Picabia rejected the modern and always had a dadaist spirit, someone who wanted to change the way we look at art and not be confined to rules of aesthetic. Picabia is complex due to his drive to make art explode and his combinations of unrelated ideas to make nonsensical images with words in order to speak about something in society. He is necessary to study in order to understand the development of art in the Western world. In addition, he was vital to the Armory Show and should not be left out of the conversation and be reduced to a minor character. Picabia's work is strong enough to stand alone and deserves to be written back into history due to his dynamic words he shared with the world altering how we conceptualize and understand art.

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