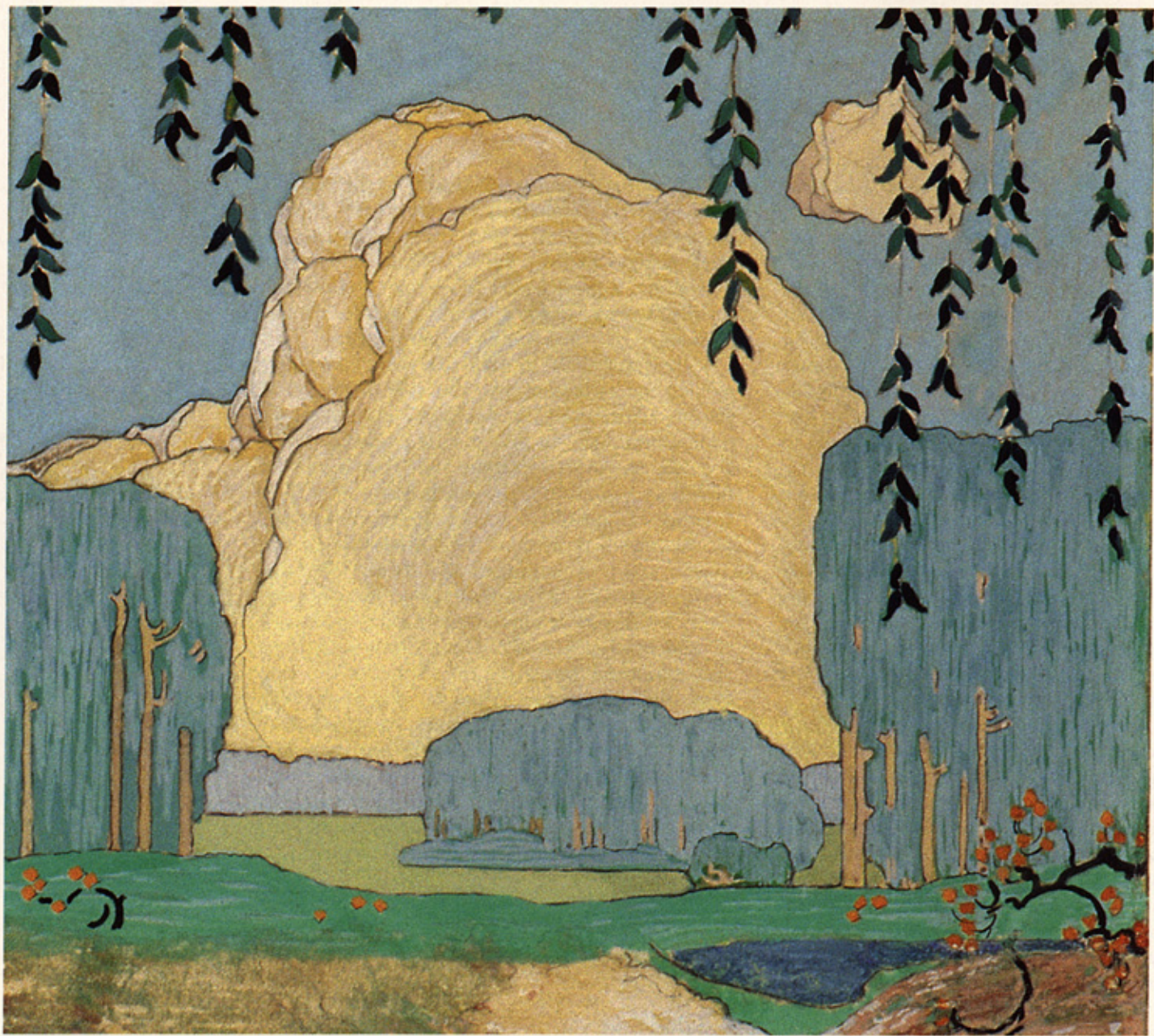


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*Cloud Bank — Evening, 1916-17*

## CHAPTER 1

Unlike his close friend Grant Wood, Marvin D. Cone did not fit the popular conception of an artist, nor did he share Wood's sense of mission about stylistic movements. In particular, Cone was not at all sympathetic to regionalism, although he is frequently described as a regionalist painter. For Cone, painting was strictly a personal pursuit, with little relationship to movements or stylistic trends.

By most standards, Cone's life was relatively unremarkable. He lived all of his seventy-four years in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where he married, raised a family, and taught art classes for more than four decades. He was highly respected by his contemporaries, but he never achieved great fame in the art world. Yet as conventional as his life may seem, his work shows him to have been a passionate artist who had a rare sensitivity to his environment and a concern for the cultural expressiveness of a work of art. Cedar Rapids provided Cone with a unique opportunity: to be a professional artist in a small community at an important time in its artistic and cultural history. In return, Cone was always conscious of his community responsibility as an artist. He was a moving spirit behind the Cedar Rapids Art Association, in which he remained active for more than forty-five years. This devotion to Cedar Rapids might seem incongruous, but Cone was aware that his environment greatly assisted him in his painterly search to express universal values. As this survey of Cone's work demonstrates, he was an exquisite craftsman and an important artist in the long tradition of American painting.

Cone's paintings can be roughly divided into four periods. None of these periods can be said to represent a mature style, because throughout his life Cone kept exploring new ideas, all of which were equally valid directions. The years 1919 to 1929 were his formative period, when he first developed the stylistic tendencies that would continue through his later work. When Cone and Grant Wood traveled abroad in the summer of 1920, hoping to improve their technical skills, the trip proved influential. The result was a stunning series of impressionistic views of the picturesque cityscape and landscape—

Paris streets and gardens, the French countryside. When he returned to Iowa, Cone began to work with a more sophisticated technique, including the use of suggestive color rich with light and an increasingly stylized method of rendering forms, such as breaking landscapes into layers of component parts. Many of these techniques predated by ten years similar developments in Wood's work, yet Cone avoided his friend's almost exclusive concern with design and his accompanying creation of an overly idealized environment.

During the 1930s, Cone concentrated on the landscape of the Midwest, and the paintings he produced epitomize his work. The flavor of midwestern light and the complex shapes of the land and the sky are captured in paintings like the splendid *Prelude* (1931, cat. no. 246), which is at once a powerful statement of the mysteries of nature and an extremely personal expression of solitude and tranquility. In his works of this period, Cone clearly was seeking to communicate nature's sublimity, rather than its mere physical qualities. If in this work and others he shared with the regionalists a search for cultural roots, he also saw his landscapes as optimistic symbols for a revitalized nation.

Cone's interest in nature continued throughout the 1940s, but he began to incorporate interior elements such as doors, windows, and hallways. These provided more opportunity for technical virtuosity. Cone created a number of haunting interiors with doors or windows revealing expansive voids beyond. These interiors, together with his animated carnival scenes (which frequently included a peering self-portrait), attest to the growing personal quality of Cone's work. Finally, in the 1950s and 1960s, Cone created a powerful series of expressionistic interpretations of nature. Here he communicated his innermost feelings in purely painterly terms.

Cone's reason for painting did not parallel stylistic developments. In fact, he remained somewhat aloof from the stylistic and ideological struggles around him. He did not leave extensive autobiographical comments, but his written statements do offer considerable insight into his singular artis-

tic purpose. On one occasion in 1947 he wrote, “A work of art is a moving communication from an artist to a spectator. Therefore, when you look at a painting, don’t worry too much about what it represents but look rather for the nature of the man who painted it—his spirit and fire.”<sup>1</sup>

This introspective attitude permeated Cone’s work and was the essence of his pursuit. At the same time, his art is not a realistic record of his surroundings, but a collective visual image, a synthesis of his values, his imagination, and their relationship to his experiences, his family, and the locality he knew best. From a practical standpoint, his work has another important connecting element—an emphasis on design rather than representation. Cone was trained as a designer to build on the principles of decoration with an insistence on simplicity and the use of pattern, and throughout his work a gradual reductive process of refinement is evident.

It seems likely that Cone’s lifelong objective was to increase his capacity for perception, to understand and to reveal his own being. Cone’s work does not deal with elusive mysteries, but strives to impart his sincere understanding of his experiences for the viewer’s consideration. Each work reflects an individual moment in time and space, fixing Cone’s identity within a universal context of inevitable change.

Marvin Dorwart Cone was born on 21 October 1891 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Cone family was well known, relatively prosperous, and among Iowa’s earliest settlers. His father, Harry DeForest Cone (1860-1931), was a fashionable jeweler and shopowner from whom Marvin probably acquired his meticulous sense of precision. Little is known about his mother, Gertrude H. Dorwart (1859-1918), except that she and her son were very close and Marvin shared her interest in literature.

The Cone and Dorwart families arrived in Iowa during the 1830s and 1840s from Connecticut and Pennsylvania, respectively.<sup>2</sup> They had a strong sense of history and a prominent community presence; and they were active in civic and church organizations. Daniel Cone probably emigrated from Scotland in the mid-seventeenth century and settled on the Connecticut River near the present site of Haddam, Connecticut. He knew both John Winthrop, governor of the Connecticut Colony, and Peter Stuyvesant, governor of New Netherlands, and he used these acquaintances to acquire respectable land holdings. His descendants remained close to the original site of his Connecticut land grant

until 1838, when Marvin’s great-grandfather, Norris Cone (1808-85), moved to Iowa and became quite wealthy in his own right.

Unfortunately, less is known about the Dorwart family, since Marvin Cone did not amass a comparably extensive genealogy. The family originated in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (where a street bears the name), remaining there until 1849, when David Dorwart (1818-97) moved to Iowa. Like the Cones, Dorwart was a well-known and highly respected citizen of Cedar Rapids.

There is no thorough record of Marvin’s life during his early years. In the late 1910s he completed a cursory outline of various experiences that he intended to write about someday, but never did. In retrospect, however, it is clear that his childhood reminiscences provided a wealth of subjects for Cone the mature artist. At the age of four, for example, Marvin had a favorite uncle named Ben Dorwart, who had a large black beard and played a game of frightening him.<sup>3</sup> Almost forty-five years later, this same uncle was the subject of Cone’s provocative series of haunted interiors, which are peopled only by portraits of Uncle Ben.<sup>4</sup> Curiously, in 1966 Cone’s grandchildren fondly remembered that he scared them with terrible tales based on *The Wizard of Oz* or the story of John Brown.<sup>5</sup>

The circus and the carnival also fascinated Cone. As a youngster, he earned a show ticket by carrying water for the elephants. Family members recall that Marvin was there when the train arrived, assiduously watched all the preparations, reveled in the sideshows, and was intrigued by the performers.<sup>6</sup> His captivation with the spectacle of the circus continued to the mid-1930s. His excellent paintings of that period do not have storytelling functions; instead, they are exquisite explorations of the psychological subtleties of human nature.

In 1906, Cone was a freshman at Washington High School, then located at Greene Square near the newly completed Carnegie Library building. A classmate in his history and drawing classes was Grant Wood. The two young artists became constant companions, although their art teacher Emma Grattan recalled that even at this early age they were a study in contrasts.<sup>7</sup> Wood was outgoing and socially inclined, while Cone was more of a recluse, yet they maintained a tremendous respect for one another that over the years precluded critical comments. They did not always agree, and often the difference was great, but their bond of friendship transcended their disagreements. Cone was never jealous of his friend’s financial success and meteoric rise to fame, but remained consistently supportive



The Cone Family, 1898, Marvin with father Harry D. Cone, great-grandmother Rachel Smith (l) and grandmother Mary Cone (r).



Grant Wood and Marvin D. Cone, Class of 1910, Washington High School, Cedar Rapids.

and loyal.

In high school, Cone and Wood were active in many projects, including painting scenery for plays and doing illustrations for the yearbook and other publications.<sup>8</sup> Several of Cone's illustrations and small oils survive, but the oils are little more than tentative explorations showing limited technical skill. What Cone and Wood lacked in this regard they made up for with their youthful enthusiasm. Many trips to Chicago and Minneapolis to view exhibitions, along with their involvement in the Cedar Rapids Art Association, helped to further their conviction to pursue careers as artists.

The Cedar Rapids Art Association dates to the 1890s, making it the oldest fine arts organization in Iowa. It was formally incorporated in 1905 to operate a public gallery on the second floor of the new Carnegie Library. The aggressive exhibition and acquisition program gave Marvin and Grant a consistent and valuable exposure to fine works of art. Both young men began to spend a lot of time at the gallery, assisting on "unpacking" days and even sleeping there so the association could save money on security. Their commitment never abated, and the impact of their experience was substantial. They acquired a firsthand knowledge of some of the finest examples of contemporary American painting, sculpture, and graphic art.

The association sponsored excellent exhibitions, including works by a diversity of American talent—Robert Henri, Lorado Taft, George Bellows, Childe Hassam, Charles W. Hawthorne, C. F. Browne, T. C. Steele, Irving Crouse, and many others.<sup>9</sup> Similar exhibits of graphic arts were hosted there by the Chicago Society of Etchers through the efforts of Bertha E. Jaques. The impact of this impressive organization on any community would have been great, but it was especially significant in this town of 25,000.

Upon graduation from Washington High School in 1910, Cone intended to enroll at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but his father did not fully share his interest in art and insisted that he first pursue a liberal arts education. Cone enrolled at Coe College, where he would return in 1919 to begin an art department and remain for more than forty years. As an undergraduate, Cone excelled at his studies. His course selection was surprising, however, because it included only a few courses in classical art history, no studio work, and an emphasis on English, economics, French, history, and the sciences.<sup>10</sup> Cone did pursue his interest in design and decorative art by contributing a number of works to Coe's publication, the *Cosmos*.<sup>11</sup> He

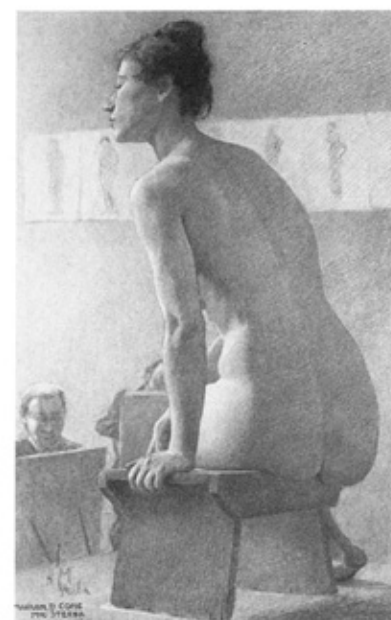
received a bachelor of science degree magna cum laude from Coe College in 1914.

During his college years, Cone remained in close contact with Grant Wood, who had moved to Chicago in 1913 to work as a jewelry designer. Visits to Chicago were frequent occurrences because Cone's father maintained an office in the Harris Trust building. At least once, Cone visited the famous Armory Show during its Chicago showing at the Art Institute (24 March-15 April 1913); his favorite work was Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 1*. Cone returned to Chicago in August 1913 with his father, who visited the Art Institute for the first time to view an exhibit by the Swedish artist Anders Zorn (1860-1920).<sup>12</sup> Finally, he made a special trip at Thanksgiving to see Wood, who greeted his startled friend at the railroad station sporting a moustache and wearing a derby.<sup>13</sup>

Cone recorded all the details of this trip in a small black notebook. Soon after his arrival, the two artists attended a gallery talk by Charles F. Browne (1859-1920) and visited with a group of Chicago painters that included John F. Stacey (1859-1948), Lawton S. Parker (1868-1954), Pauline Palmer (1867-1938), and Frank C. Peyrand (1858-1948). The next day Cone visited the School of the Art Institute for the first time and noted, "I shall never forget it. How I wished to get down to work with such opportunities and facilities at hand—Grant was drawing from life—everybody enthusiastic—a congenial atmosphere."<sup>14</sup>

The next year, in the fall of 1914, Cone left Cedar Rapids and enrolled in the Art Institute School.<sup>15</sup> Cone's father did help with the tuition in spite of his opposition to his son's career choice, but Cone still found it necessary to sell drawings to supplement his income. Cone's program of study over the next three years was diversified; class records indicate that he excelled in drawing and showed a strong design orientation. His teachers never achieved national fame, but their work was well regarded. Cone thrived in this atmosphere, where his personal interests in design and decoration were in harmony with his class regimen.

In general, the dominant painting style in Chicago was an amalgamation of impressionism, tonalism, and realism, with an important qualification.<sup>16</sup> Since the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, the Midwest had been experiencing a conscious rise of cultural expressiveness. Three Chicagoans—writer Hamlin Garland, sculptor Lorado Taft, and painter Charles F. Browne—were vociferously advocating the Americanization of modern art in the form of an aesthetic nativism or



*Life Study — Female Seated Nude*, 1915



Marvin D. Cone and Grant Wood at The Art Institute of Chicago, January, 1916. Photograph by Arthur W. Hall [1889-1981].



*The Top of the Hill, 1916*



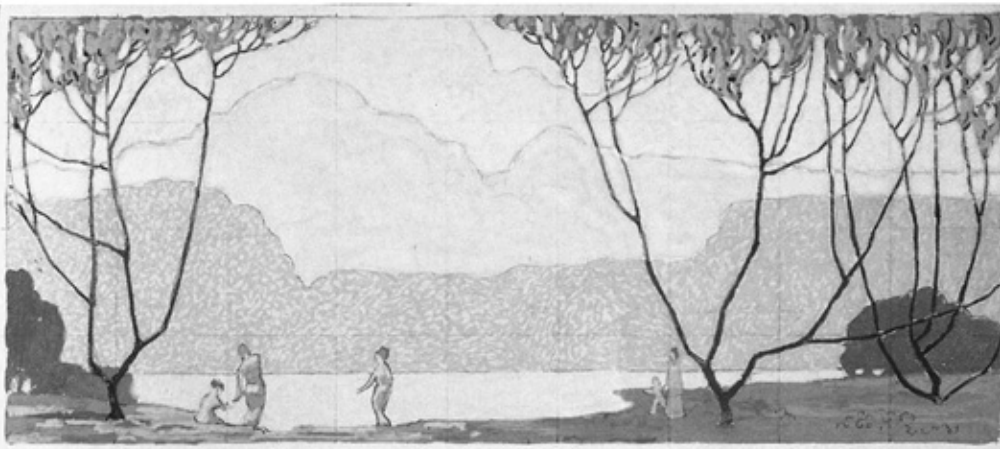
Marvin D. Cone in Chicago,  
Photograph by Arthur W. Hall  
[1889-1981].

regionalism. Simply stated, Garland sought an Americanized response to French impressionism. Not surprisingly, Garland, Taft, and Browne were highly influential in the Cedar Rapids Art Association. They gave periodic lectures and helped to locate exhibitions and secure acquisitions. Inevitably, these activities reflected their own inclinations, so a preference for regional subjects predominated. It is important to keep in mind that for many people, including Cone, "regionalism" was not a style but an attitude toward subject matter. To a generation of younger artists, impressionism became a stylistic vehicle for decoration, abstraction, and simplification.<sup>17</sup> Grant Wood and others sometimes referred to the style as decorative; this is the way Wood described his own mature technique, which was characterized by the "bird's-eye view" of the Iowa landscape.

Periodically during his years in Chicago, Cone recorded his observations in a notebook, which gives us a rare glimpse of his personal interests. The writings are eclectic, ranging from his own work to items from lectures or readings. In 1913 he wrote, "The imagination is the divinest of all the powers which men are able to put forth because it is the creative power . . . It is the subtle differences in the individual renderings of nature that are the life blood of art . . . Art is the representation of Nature, not Nature reproduced but Nature as interpreted by the personality of the artist."<sup>18</sup> Other entries deal with a diversity of issues. There are even several lines of simple verse by Cone that could describe many of his later paintings:

*October's hills are all aglow  
Recalling some fair dream of old  
And they seem bathed in a haze of pearl  
In whose depths float drowsy clouds  
all creamy gold.<sup>19</sup>*

*Big Hills, 1917*



A great deal of Cone's work from 1915 to 1917 has survived. It is of considerable note because of its high quality and because it anticipates many of Cone's future interests. The works are in four basic categories: charcoals and oils done either from plaster casts or from live models; landscapes done in decorative illustration classes; works executed purely for his personal enjoyment; and pen-and-ink drawings done as magazine illustrations to earn money. Cone's drawings from his life class are similar to those of countless art students, since this type of work was the mainstay of the American academic system. At the same time, these drawings reveal an artist who is sensitive to his subject and has considerable technical skill. It is surprising that Cone did not actively continue with figurative themes; he was good at figure drawing and clearly enjoyed the opportunity.

Cone's decorative illustrations from this period are splendid works with beautiful colors and a skillful sense of design. The drawings for *Big Hills* (1917, cat. no. 24) and *Cloud Bank—Evening* (1916-17, cat. no. 20) both show the extent to which Cone used large masses of color to articulate his structural forms. A 1917 photograph of Cone's Chicago apartment reveals that the work *Big Hills* was originally executed as an overmantel. (Winnifred Cone recalls that in the 1920s and 1930s Marvin often wished he had time to do a mural, but his teaching demands left few uninterrupted periods.) Many of the qualities of this work and his other gouaches also appear in Cone's numerous pen-and-ink illustrations and in his beautiful painting, *The Top of the Hill* (1916, cat. no. 13).<sup>20</sup> This work displays an uncertain compromise between broad areas of solid colors and an impressionistic foreground. This stylistic tension would gradually resolve itself over the next five years, as Cone moved from an impressionistic style to one of simplification in both color and structure. In *The Top of the Hill*, Cone also created a dynamic space, yet maintained an overall mood that is contemplative, calm, and introspective—qualities that characterized much of his mature work. Even in his early years, Cone already sensed the type of work he most favored.

Between 1915 and 1917 Cone also created more than seventy-five designs for *The Continent*, a magazine with affiliation to the Presbyterian Church that was published in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago.<sup>21</sup> These illustrations represented a considerable investment of his creative energies. In fact, in 1916 Cone was determined to pursue a career as an illustrator.<sup>22</sup> He obviously enjoyed illustration

because it gave free expression to his imagination. The works for *The Continent* are diverse in style and subject matter, including industrial, rural, and genre scenes (Cone deliberately did only two known works that reflect a religious subject). Many are readily identifiable as his work, and, perhaps not surprisingly, he later incorporated many details from these illustrations into his paintings.

The development of any artist is largely a matter of self-education, a factor conditioned by the potential and limitations of his environment. In Chicago, Cone thrived. He had many friends, counting his roommate Arthur W. Hall (1889-1981) and Grant Wood among his best.<sup>23</sup> Together with Hall—who became an accomplished teacher and etcher—Cone made many sketching trips around the Chicago area. Hall's preference for watercolor probably prompted Cone to use this medium for the first and only time. These small works of the dazzling spectacle of Chicago in the rain reveal a strong impressionistic influence in the natural light; they also have a strong design orientation.

Cone greatly benefited from his years at the Art Institute School and from his teachers there. At one point he recalled: "They were great days, days so novel—so full of intent, interesting happenings and sights. One is truly impressed by the 'atmosphere' in those days—how it uplifts and takes one out of one's self. I lived in a dreamland then."<sup>24</sup>

World War I interrupted Cone's studies, forcing him to leave the Art Institute School in the spring of 1917. He would not be awarded his diploma from the Department of Drawing, Painting, and Illustration until 27 June 1927, based on his post-1917 accomplishments. On 28 May 1917, he enlisted in the Headquarters Company of the 67th Brigade—34th Division (formerly the First Iowa Infantry) and after basic training left Union Station in Cedar Rapids on 25 September for Camp Cody near Deming, New Mexico. His fluency in French brought him a job as an interpreter for Brigadier General H. A. Allen and Major C. B. Robbins, both Cedar Rapidians. (Ten years later, in 1927, Robbins was chairman of the Memorial Building Commission that selected Grant Wood to execute his monumental stained glass window in Cedar Rapids.) Eight other Cedar Rapidians were with Cone: Clare Marshall, Harold Pfaff, James Yuill, Keith Snyder, Leland Mahaffey, Hyatt Newell, Henry Martin, and C. B. Arnold.

Together with General Allen and Major Robbins, these young men made about four excursions into the Mimbres Valley of the Florita Mountains,

traveling about twenty miles north of camp to an Indian site that had been partially excavated by the Smithsonian Institution in 1914.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the better-known cliff dwellers, this branch of the Pueblo tribe settled on the plain in the Mimbres Valley. During their amateur excavations—of which many interesting photos survive—Cone and his friends unearthed several bowl fragments and human skulls. On 15 July 1918, the *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette* carried the story, "Marvin Cone Tells of Exploration of Ruins near Cody," in which Cone sounded as excited about his finds as he was about the diversion from camp. His fascination with this culture continued through the late 1920s; he saved clippings about later excavations from *Art Digest* and *Art and Archaeology*. While at Camp Cody, Cone also designed the insignia for his division and began to carry a small sketch box to paint landscapes.<sup>26</sup>

In late August 1918, Cone and his company left Camp Cody, traveled to San Antonio, New Orleans, Charlotte, and Washington, D. C., finally reaching New York. They departed for France, arriving in the beginning of October, on a day Cone described as one of warm sunshine and mellow color. For the young artist, this trip and his subsequent stay in France must have been a pivotal experience. He never saw combat, since the Armistice was signed less than a month after his arrival, but he was able to travel and study until July 1919.

Cone kept detailed diaries of his experiences, frequently digressing into French. He seemed especially captivated by the countryside with its tall poplars and rambling red-roofed villages, the many old chateaus, and the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. He also kept a scrapbook of significant sites in Paris, with extensive notes about their history. He made many acquaintances, taking special delight in the young children he met: "Many a time have I gone out the chateau gateway with a happy youngster on my back and one on either side holding my hands and doing their best to keep step."<sup>27</sup> On one visit to the Luxembourg Gardens he expressed disappointment that they were empty; he missed the gay shouts of the children at play sailing their boats in the shallow pond.<sup>28</sup>

In St. Medard, Cone was especially taken with a neglected chateau, which he described in some detail:

*The Chateau d'Autin was half hidden by immense vine covered trees—horse chestnut, magnolia and pine. The lawn and splendid garden were overgrown—four years of neglect — "la guerre." Still, it was an impressive place with its mossy stone wall, its lodge at the big gate-*



Marvin D. Cone at Camp Deming, New Mexico, July 1918.



*Evening Clouds, New Mexico, 1917*



Marvin D. Cone in Montpellier, France, February 1919.

way, its old round tower and circular staircase, its sombre high ceilinged rooms . . . and its portraits. An ideal place for ghosts, it should, by all means, have been haunted. And I'm sure it was, although, during our occupancy, nothing unusual in the ghost line was reported. Every Chateau, to be worthy of the name, ought to have something of the sort prowling about.<sup>29</sup>

This was an isolated allusion to a theme that would occupy him in the late 1930s and 1940s. For the time being, Cone was far more concerned with his observations of the low-hanging clouds in Pannes, the poplars in Celleneuve, or the children in the Luxembourg Gardens, all subjects frequently found in his paintings.

Cone was fortunate to study briefly at the University of Montpellier School of Fine Arts in February 1919.<sup>30</sup> Several hundred servicemen were there on a special arrangement under which the government paid the salary of any soldier who wanted to study while waiting to be shipped home. Cone enjoyed the experience tremendously, making many trips to Paris, Langres, Bordeaux, Nancy, Montpellier, Chateau-Thierry, Nimes, and other French cities. His diary also mentions some contact with Alfred-Jacques Boisson (b. 1867), a student of Cabanel whose work Cone enjoyed.

Like many of his contemporaries, Cone had always been encouraged to travel abroad, and this stay in France satisfied his expectations. The influence on his work was inevitable and substantial. The French landscape greatly appealed to him, but he also readily identified with European painting traditions and would always have a strong admiration for the art of the past.<sup>31</sup> This was reasonable considering his training at the Art Institute. But Cone's response to France was more encompassing; he was enchanted by the country and its people. Notebook entries made several days before his departure indicate the extent of his feelings:

*It is a matter of days now until I shall leave France and I do not hesitate to say that I feel a little bad about it even though leaving means home. Her winding rivers, her crumbling castles which still retain some of their medieval splendor; her broad fertile meadows, her blue hills, her vineyards, her poplar trees and winding roads, her quaint towns and her cool dusky cathedrals—they all somehow get a hold of you. And then her splendid and glorious traditions, her idealism . . . and the amiability of her people . . . All my expectations were fulfilled—and more. I expected to find a beautiful country. I found it. France challenges the world for beauty.<sup>32</sup>*



*The Aeroplanes* — 1919. Pencil, 6 1/4 × 9 1/2 inches.

Cone was back in Cedar Rapids on 30 July 1919, having made plans to return to Paris the following summer. After the war he faced the question of beginning a career and satisfying his interest in art at the same time. While studying at the University of Montpellier, he had been offered a job by Dr. Anna Heyberger, chairman of the French Department at Coe College. The war had stimulated students' demand to learn the language, and Cone, who had excelled in French at Coe and was now fluent, was well qualified for the position. He anxiously accepted it, since few other job options were available and commercial art was not a viable alternative in Cedar Rapids. His mother had died in 1918, and Cone no doubt also wanted to spend time with his father, although they had little in common.

Cone remained at Coe for forty-one years, teaching classes in French, studio art, the humanities, and art history. With his return, Cedar Rapids had one of its first professional artists. He and Wood quickly renewed their friendship, as well as their active involvement with the local art association, and together they painted during the summer months. In September 1919, as both artists began teaching (Wood taught art at Jackson High School), they no doubt wondered whether they could ultimately survive as artists.

During his initial year at Coe, Cone established the first studio class in freehand drawing.<sup>33</sup> Predictably, the response to his class was limited, but it was sufficient for Coe to continue the offering. In October, Wood and Cone held a highly successful exhibition at the downtown picture galleries of the Killian Company department store. The exhibition was the first real opportunity for Cedar Rapidians to see a large group of works by both artists, and the public response was positive. At the outset, both artists were praised for the number of works depicting familiar local scenes. A writer for the *Sunday Republican* of 12 October commented: "These two young men with the quick appreciation of the artist's eye for form and color, have caught and recorded the many paintable bits of beauty to be found around the country, in a fresh-plowed field or a rolling hill-line heaved against a mass of cloud."<sup>34</sup>

Cone's sky subjects were singled out, and his works were deemed to have much poetic feeling and interpretive power. The same critic went on to write,

*Mr. Cone comes back to us from France with a fresh outlook and new achievement. His charming little French series, small sketches, owing to the fact that he had to carry them in his pack, make a strong appeal to the poetic sense. His renderings of the vibrant French*



atmospheric effects are unusually fine. He has a strong decorative sense and interprets all his facts of nature with this quality. In approaching nature's mood, he is more or less subjective and treats them as reflections of his own. His work is strongly idealistic rather than realistic.<sup>35</sup>

Fortunately, several of the paintings that were shown in this exhibit have been located, providing an excellent perspective on Cone's early work. Many are small, tentative panels with choppy brushwork and human figures summarized by quick brushstrokes. At the same time, many of them have smooth, nearly unbroken brushstrokes. Others combine interesting subjects with powerful formal arrangements and evocative light. In *Sunny Afternoon—Montpellier* (1919, cat. no. 39), Cone's decision to focus on the rooftops approaches an almost abstract sensibility. Recognized separate from their actual structures, the rooftops retain tremendous poetic impact. Several other works, including *Evening Light, French Village* (1919, cat. no. 40), and *Poppies* (1919, cat. no. 45), were created in a distinctly impressionistic mode.

Clearly, both artists had made a great start, but they readily admitted that they needed to improve their technical skills and the range of their subject matter. Another trip to Europe was planned, and this time it was a joint venture. After the school term finished, Wood and Cone traveled abroad in the summer of 1920. They visited London, Liverpool, and Antwerp, but they spent most of their time in Paris.



*Sunny Afternoon — Montpellier, 1919*



*Evening Light — French Village, 1919*



*Cloud Bank, 1921-22*

## CHAPTER 2

Cone's trip to Europe with Grant Wood in the summer of 1920 had a profound influence on his work. It resulted in a stunning series of picturesque cityscapes and landscapes. Cone kept a detailed diary from their 22 June arrival in Liverpool to their 22 August departure from Antwerp. He also took a large number of fascinating photos that parallel scenes in several of his paintings. Cone's journal, which constitutes an almost daily record of the two artists' activities and documents a number of works of art, shows him to be equally at ease painting in his studio or out-of-doors, and it quickly reveals his favorite subjects.<sup>1</sup> Soon after his arrival, he wrote:

*We spent a very fine cool evening in the Luxembourg Gardens—first sketching down near the big pool . . . Hundreds of people are strolling about, singly, in pairs and in groups, scores more are sitting under the trees—resting or cooling off after the days work—children are rolling hoops, babes are toddling about . . . What a boon for Parisians is this garden with its water jets, statues and shady paths—flowers. Balustrades—fountains and trees.<sup>2</sup>*

A short time later, Cone continued:

*We are painting out near Ville d'Avray where Corot used to live and paint . . . I cannot begin to tell you how very lovely the ponds of Ville d'Avray are and how very paintable. Here and there graceful trees hang their drooping branches down into the water. Slender water grasses grow in profusion along the grassy banks and lily pads form patterns on the mirror surface of the water. Poplar trees and the tile roofs of creamy houses find themselves repeated in the water.<sup>3</sup>*

Paris held great appeal for Cone. He was captivated by the ambience of this city—its varied activity, its luminosity, and its sense of history. His active interest in the art of the past was satisfied by numerous trips to museums, galleries, and historic sites. Artists did not attract attention there, and he relished his sense of anonymity. He absorbed everything he could from his surroundings, developing a strong association with his subject matter that probably contributed significantly to the success of his

Painted pieces. Many of Cone's contemporaries shared his reaction to France, including Edward Hopper, whom he greatly admired.<sup>4</sup> France would always hold a key place in Cone's memory. In later years, he sincerely regretted that he returned only once, in 1929.

Although Cone readily assimilated the influence of his European environs, he clearly remained identified with his homeland and convinced of his desire to create an art that was American, modern, and done only to please himself, not to satisfy outside demands. Curiously, Cone's paintings from his Paris sojourn show a decisive compromise in style between native or decorative impressionism and abstraction. They also show a significant change in his application of paint, away from the short strokes of his more impressionistic style toward more simplified broad color areas. Cone and Wood held an exhibition of about thirty of their paintings in the ship's salon on the voyage home and in Cedar Rapids soon after their return. The exhibits were very popular, with Cone's paintings of clouds and the Luxembourg Gardens receiving the most critical praise. Cone's public quickly made several observations: They sensed his improvement from his 1919 exhibit, observed his struggle to capture the difference between the sunlight in Paris and in this country, and noted the similarity to Wood's work, a result of their close working relationship.<sup>5</sup> Immediately after their return, however, each artist pursued a different direction. Wood liked to work on a hard surface, clearly favoring the composition board he had used on this trip, while Cone increasingly enjoyed the feel of a brush on canvas. In any case, Cone's decision to exhibit these paintings from his summer in France showed his high regard both for his own work and for the entire experience.<sup>6</sup>

During a Raffles hunt on the voyage home, Grant introduced Marvin to a young Canadian, Elizabeth Winnifred Swift.<sup>7</sup> Miss Swift and her sister, Vera, were also returning from France, where they had visited the graves of their brother and Vera's husband, both of whom had lost their lives



Grant Wood (1891-1942). Relief Plaque of Marvyn Cone, 1920. Bronze, 3 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches.



*A Bit of Sun, Luxembourg Gardens, 1920*



Marvin D. Cone in Paris, July 1920. Photograph by Grant Wood.



Marvin D. Cone and Winnifred Swift aboard the S.S. Grampian, 3 September 1920. Photographs by Grant Wood.



Marvin D. Cone and Winnifred Swift, 5 July 1921.



while fighting in the Canadian forces. Marvin and Winnifred's attraction was immediate and their courtship intense. According to Cone's notebook entries, they met on 30 August 1920, and almost right away Cone decided to leave ship in Montreal with Wood instead of continuing on to New York. He remained there for several days before returning home. Soon after, he began a series of seven mysterious trips to Ontario. Unknown to his friends, he was trying to convince Winnifred to leave Watford. He finally succeeded. On 26 November 1920, he presented her with an engagement ring.

Winnifred and Marvin were married on 10 August 1921 at Trinity Church in Watford, Ontario.<sup>8</sup> They spent several weeks at the Swift summer home on Lake Huron before returning to Cedar Rapids, where they briefly lived in an apartment but soon moved to their home at 1721 5th Avenue, S.E. Their only child Doris Elaine was born the next year. Even at this early time, the Cones never thought about moving elsewhere. They liked Cedar Rapids; it was a familiar place, Marvin had a good job, and they quickly made many good friends.

At about the same time, Cone began a series of extremely sensitive portraits of Winnifred. Theirs was a special and close relationship, in which they were partners in all intellectual and artistic pursuits. Winnifred has warmly recalled the early 1920s as "very happy times." They spent a great deal of time together; she accompanied him while he painted landscapes, and he loved to read mysteries aloud while Winnifred was knitting. They also made summer driving trips to visit her parents in Canada. "He was always anxious to do anything to make me happy," says Winnifred, but at times she regrets that these trips took him away from his painting.

Immediately after his summer trip to France, Cone had assumed expanded teaching duties at Coe College in the fall of 1920. In contrast to many of his contemporaries, who turned to teaching only as a last resort, Cone pursued it with unabated enthusiasm for more than forty years. He always maintained an extensive teaching schedule, including studio art, art history, and humanities courses. He enjoyed the daily exchange with his students, showing a commitment to them that was surpassed only by his devotion to his family. As he told a reporter in January 1927, "Without putting painting aside, my chief hobby is my four-year-old daughter, Doris; and what time I get to paint is most graciously awarded to me by her."<sup>9</sup> Later that year Cone completed and exhibited an extremely sensitive plaster bas-relief portrait of his daughter.

During the 1920s, Cone's professional activity intensified. Exhibitions of his work at the Cedar Rapids Art Association became annual events; other exhibitions were held in Milwaukee, Duluth, and Minneapolis-St. Paul.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Cone provided strong artistic leadership at the Cedar Rapids Art Association. He organized many of the traveling exhibitions, arranged for lectures by distinguished speakers, and guided an aggressive program for the acquisition of contemporary art.<sup>11</sup> He also gave frequent painting demonstrations. On 10 April 1921, for example, Grant Wood gave a lecture comparing the subdued palette of Adams, Steele, and Foster with the bright light and color of Dudley, Grant, and Symons, using works in the art association collection. Cone then painted in bright colors a scene of people in a Parisian park. He also began contributing exhibit reviews to the Cedar Rapids newspapers.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly this was a productive period for Cone. Sales of his paintings provided a much-needed but small supplement to his modest teaching income (in addition to his Iowa market, Cone made sales through the J. W. Young Gallery in Chicago). He was not aggressive about sales, and this had a direct bearing on the impressive quality of his paintings. A staunch individualist, Cone painted what he wished to paint regardless of what anyone thought of his work. While his art seemed to be superficial representations of commonplace scenes, it was in reality intensely personal and introspective. Cone did not need to strive for an American quality in his work, for such a quality was already an integral part of his character. He never saw a need for nationalistic ambitions and was somewhat amused in the 1930s by the term "regionalism."

For Cone, the early 1920s were marked by the consolidation of his artistic motives and the beginning of major changes in his work. Between 1921 and about 1928, he tended to paint almost exclusively clouds and landscapes, with a few isolated works recalling his French experience. His work already showed an intuitive response to his surroundings, but these paintings in particular are an important expression of Cone's personal vision of the world. During the 1920s, Cone would increasingly develop such simple landscape views into powerfully evocative and intensely personal works.

In general, Cone's clouded landscapes represent the continuation of a systematic move away from an impressionistic style toward compositions characterized by precise design. His brush strokes became more direct, in contrast to the short, choppy

strokes of his earlier work. Light, however, remained the vehicle through which he expressed the vitality and immediacy of the forms before him. Furthermore, the design was frequently derived from the slow contemplation of a precise moment of time in space. In reviewing a 1922 exhibit, George Keeler (d. 1944), an acquaintance of Cone's and cousin to Wood, commented on Cone's glowing paintings of autumn hillsides and towering clouds: "The characteristic aspect of his skies is a physical joy and he has admirably caught the spirit and feeling of space and light. His landscapes are charming visions of nature in their exquisitely fine tones."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in both 1923 and 1924 an unidentified critic commented on his "paint-poems," landscapes with opalescent cloud and sky effects: "Inspired by play of late afternoon color in the massive hills east of the city, these canvases represent a transient aspect of nature, colorful moods which last but a few moments and are gone."<sup>14</sup> Several days later, the same writer commented, "Practically all the paintings that Mr. Cone is showing received their inspiration from the skies that show their glories above the open running country southeast of the Oak Hill district. His paintings are poetic interpretations, rather than realistic representations."<sup>15</sup> Cone continued with this subject matter through 1928, when an exhibit reviewer observed, "Due to his imaginative quality, his poetry, he has found free expression in these cloud portrayals. His love of color, especially blues, greens, lavenders, and dull shades of red, is evident throughout."<sup>16</sup> This was the last exhibit that concentrated solely on landscapes and clouds. Apparently, as Cone indicated many times, this theme no longer interested him, and he was ready to move on to something else.

For all practical purposes, Cone did not have a great deal of time to pursue his painting. He remained diligent about his responsibilities at the art association, and his class load was heavy.<sup>17</sup> In the fall of 1925 he taught a course in art appreciation and classical art, as well as one in freehand drawing. In his drawing class—the only studio art offering at Coe until 1928 when still-life painting was introduced—the students worked in charcoal from plaster casts. The enrollment was about ten, a significant increase over previous years.<sup>18</sup> The next year a new studio was established in the now-demolished Williston Hall, and there was a slight enrollment increase. The same studio served as Coe's exhibit gallery, which in 1927 housed the first exhibit of paintings by Grant Wood and Marvin Cone. On 17 June 1927, Cone finally received his diploma from the Department of Drawing, Paint-

ing, and Illustration of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, after petitioning Dean Raymond P. Ensign on the basis of his post-1917 accomplishments. Since 1924 he had attended classes at the University of Iowa, seeking to satisfy a new Coe requirement that he have his graduate degree in order to continue teaching French.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1920s, Cedar Rapids was a thriving atmosphere for the arts. In addition to the Cedar Rapids Art Association, an excellent symphony orchestra and community theater had been formed. The city's cultural element was greatly enhanced by programs at Coe College, Cornell College, and the University of Iowa. This environment, as well as the size of the community, made it an ideal candidate in 1928 for a \$50,000 grant from the American Federation of Arts and the Carnegie Foundation to support an experimental art station. Cedar Rapids was selected because it was a typical community of less than 100,000 people, sufficiently removed from any large city. The purpose of the experiment was to enlarge the place of art in the daily life of a community. It lasted until 1933 under the direction of a trained museum administrator, Edward B. Rowan (1898-1946), who arrived in June 1928.

The results were prodigious. The Little Gallery, as it was called, was an extension of the Cedar Rapids Art Association. Under Rowan's leadership, it was a thoroughly professional operation with considerable impact. Rowan animated public interest in the arts. Truly a civic art center, the Little Gallery sponsored exceptional exhibitions emphasizing the best in contemporary painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts. There were also classes in creative writing.<sup>20</sup> The Little Gallery attracted considerable interest in established art circles. New York dealers were extremely cooperative, as were contemporary artists, including Lorado Taft, who donated two of his well-known dioramas. The success was underscored in 1930 when Cone and Rowan attended the 21st Annual Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Washington, D.C., where Rowan delivered a well-received paper on "The Cedar Rapids Experiment."<sup>21</sup> Rowan's report reveals the exciting result of their endeavor. In 1931 the Little Gallery and the art association merged into one operation. Unfortunately, the timing of the Carnegie experiment coincided with the Depression, which doomed the Stone City Art Colony and had a negative effect on the Cedar Rapids Art Association.

In 1929 Rowan took it upon himself to organize about twenty community patrons to fund a painting trip to France by Cone. Since 1920, Cone had very



Marvin D. and Doris Cone in their Cedar Rapids garden, July 1928.



*Golden Afternoon, 1921-22*



*Banking Clouds, 1922*



*Glowing Moment*, 1926-27



*October Afternoon*, 1928-29



*From a Paris Window*, 1929

much wanted to return to France. Now, with a stray dollar, American artists were migrating in large numbers to Paris where they could at least temporarily flourish in the atmosphere of artistic freedom and modernism. Rowan secured more than \$1,000 by arranging advance sales of the works Cone would produce. The timing was excellent for Cone. He needed a break from his hectic teaching schedule, he had been ill, and he felt the need for a fresh perspective. So on 1 June the Cones departed on the same ship as Rowan for Paris, where they remained for ten weeks.

Winnifred and Marvin (Doris remained in London, Ontario) rented an apartment at 17, rue Campagne-Premiere in Montparnasse, next to the studio of Louis Ritman (1889-1963). Cone probably knew Ritman from his Art Institute days; two years later Ritman would award Cone the prestigious Iowa Artists' Club Thompson Prize. They spent a great deal of time with their acquaintances J. Theodore Johnson (b. 1902) and his wife Mary, Daniel Catton Rich (1904-76), Anthony Angarola (1893-1929), and the sculptors Paul Manship (1885-1966) and Hermon A. MacNeil (1866-1947).<sup>22</sup> Cone's response seemed altogether similar to his feeling in 1920: He was captivated by the environment and his painting was invigorated. There was no abrupt stylistic change, but rather a hint of modernism greatly improved the refreshing quality of his work. He became more versatile and more confident of his technical ability as a painter.

The Cones thoroughly enjoyed their time with their friends in Paris. One article Rowan wrote for a Cedar Rapids newspaper (1 September 1929) vividly describes their varied activities: repeated visits to the Louvre and commercial galleries, an attempt to meet Matisse, many trips to flea markets hunting antiques, and evenings at popular gathering places.

Unfortunately, Cone did not keep a diary of this trip, but several letters home were published in the local newspaper. In his 6 August letter Cone wrote:

*There is much to write about in Paris—much material of the guide book variety which is not without some interest, but it seems to me that personal observation on the life in and around Paris might be more readable than the date of the completion of the metal roof on Chartres Cathedral for instance. All this seems far from the fashionable Paris of the boulevards—the Paris of Rue de la Paix and Place Vendome. But there is much that is provincial in this great city. Of course, goat herds in the streets are not uncommon sights and I have even seen two crows on nearby roofs. To cap the climax, there is some benighted rooster in our vicinity who greets the*

*dawn every morning in the approved way! It really sounds perfectly middle western! We are over here fundamentally to paint pictures and paint we have! Pictures along the river front, in the public gardens, the countryside around Paris, market squares, old streets and so forth have resulted from prowling around, carrying a paint box.<sup>23</sup>*

Cone once again became absorbed by his environment. His paintings reflected a greater specificity, in strong contrast to his more generalized scenes of clouds and landscapes. This was, however, only a passing diversion. Cone, like many of his contemporaries, had a tremendous admiration for the picturesque sites in and around Paris, especially Chartres. (It is not surprising that Chartres was also documented in 1929 in a series of photographs by Charles Sheeler.)<sup>24</sup> However sympathetic he was to French culture, he was equally aware that he was not a part of it. For Cone, it was necessary to feel a sense of derivation from the country in which he lived and worked.

Soon after Cone's return to Cedar Rapids, the exhibit of his summer efforts (25 November-7 December 1929) was a tremendous success. More than 300 people attended the Little Gallery reception. Edward B. Rowan prepared a perceptive review published in the December 1929 issue of the Coe College *Courier*:

*Most people think of clouds when they think of Cone's painting, but there were only two pictures in the exhibit in which clouds play an important role. There were three portraits, seven canvases given to still life, four interpretations of Notre Dame, . . . five representations of children, . . . one very small sketch of a cornfield, . . . two paintings of the roof-tops seen from Louis Ritman's studio and the remaining canvases dealt with French life and architecture. Many of Cone's canvases teem with figures, but strangely enough they are always very quiet ones. Children sail their boats, nurses brood over them in the sun . . . but there is never any shouting, never wild gesticulation, never any noise. There is, however, a sense of surprise in many of his figures, an attitude of quiet wonderment. The world is new and alluring to them and they gaze about themselves in amazement.<sup>25</sup>*

In the same review, the painter David McCosh (1903-80) commented:

*Excellent draughtsmanship and a superb sense of color and design have gone into these paintings by Marvin Cone. His color is always clean whether he is doing a "grey day" or a brilliant flower. The handling of subtler*



*Arcadia*, 1927

*greys in conjunction with patches of pure pigment is a beautiful example of color organization. This gives the pictures an abstract quality of beauty beside the character delineation of the subject.*

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Cone deliberately taught a class in still-life painting. He believed it to be an excellent way to refine his sense of design and color, while working with a subject that was dear to him. Cone drew his subjects from the beautiful garden he maintained as a hobby. His florals are exquisite works that epitomize McCosh's statement.

*In late 1929 Grant Wood observed of Cone: Still keeping his strong use of pattern and design, this past season of working so long and so directly from nature has given a certain depth and connection to his work. Happily, this added realism has in no way diminished the poetry that has always been so characteristic of Marvin Cone's paintings.<sup>26</sup>*

His painterly interest in the commonplace realities of the Parisian landscape and cityscape had since the late 1910s been applied to his Iowa homeland and had only intensified during the 1920s. Beginning with his 1919-20 paintings of cloud banks, Cone more frequently favored a stylized method of rendering forms—such as breaking the landscape into component parts—and the use of color rich with light. He was systematic in his work, moving away from an impressionist aesthetic to one dependent on interpretive design. In some ways, this corresponded to similar developments in Wood's work. Wood's investigations had been evolving ten years earlier, however, and he avoided the creation of an overly idealized environment. Cone



*Doris*, 1927. Bronze, 6 × 5½ inches.

borrowed from other sources, but his scenes were conceptually his own.

In the 1920s, Precisionist painters such as Charles Sheeler—with their dramatic compromise between traditional American realism and new abstract principles—were a major influence on Cone. Some of Cone's earliest works shared the Precisionists' stylistic use of clearly defined pattern, precise line, and flat color. His keen appreciation for Sheeler's work can be explained by these perceptive comments:

*The Precisionists were as regional in their outlook as Benton, Curry, Wood, and Marsh, who romanticized Iowa farms, Kansas prairies, and New York tenements. Sheeler was the most classical of the regionalists. He shared their American subject, eternalizing it by eliminating the transient distraction of human presence, and his sparse images idealize both the bountiful countryside and the geometrically ordered city . . . Sheeler painted a universe whose various elements relate in perfect harmony. No storm clouds appear in his blue skies; the time of day is never certain. It is always a perfect day. No sign of deterioration is permitted, even in depiction of historical subjects; his portrayals of old barns avoid the picturesque sentimentalism inherent in such subjects; every field is green in his *Arcadia*. The time is now the idealized present.<sup>27</sup>*

During the 1920s Cone consolidated his aesthetic vision and refined his technical skills, becoming a product of his own nativeness. He would emerge as a modern painter who approached a timeless landscape once again in a new and universal spirit.



*A Little Girl*, 1929



*Color Arrangement — Winnifred*, 1929



*Clouds, 1931*



## CHAPTER 3

The 1920s and 1930s were a time of profound transition and uncertainty in this country. A revival of Americanism swept the nation, precipitated by the disillusionment of World War I and the shattering of Wilsonian idealism.<sup>1</sup> People looked to the past with the earnest hope of understanding and rationalizing the present. This quest for security in a rapidly changing society sought to stress qualities of continuity and vitality. An active literature nurtured the search. The writings of Mark Twain and Walt Whitman assumed a new popularity. Along with the work of regionalist writers at Vanderbilt University, the frontier and sectionalist theories of Frederick Jackson Turner captivated the public imagination. Historians such as the influential Charles A. Beard (*The Rise of American Civilization*) dealt with the concept of America as a unique culture.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-1920s, critics began to interpret American art in geographic terms, and the widely read Thomas Craven promoted the framework for a native art that was realistic in style and traditional in subject matter. These efforts and many of the accompanying visual metaphors clearly sought to bolster morale by emphasizing what was good about American culture and society, ultimately seeking to convey in readily understandable terms the image of a healthy America. These intellectual trends also reflected the belief that art and culture function best when they mirror our native heritage and the traditional values that exemplify past achievements. A key result of this dialogue was the new importance that the landscape assumed in American cultural thought.

Marvin Cone was familiar with the writings of Edgar Lee Masters, Sinclair Lewis, and Thornton Wilder, but he was probably more inclined to respond to the work of Iowa natives such as Ruth Suckow and especially his friends Jay Sigmund and Paul Engle. Many contemporary writers dealt with the dramatic transition between nineteenth-century patterns in midwestern American society and a modern, 1920s and 1930s lifestyle. At the same time, they consistently advocated a regionalist perspective that reflected the writer's surroundings, not the

locales he or she had visited.<sup>3</sup> In reality, this admonition was not much different from the themes of aesthetic nativism and regionalism that Hamlin Garland had advocated in the late 1890s. Simply stated, both periods promoted an Americanization of modern art.

Hamlin Garland and his followers sought an Americanized response to modern art—impressionism—in order to address adequately the conscious rise of cultural expressiveness that followed the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition.<sup>4</sup> For a brief time, Chicago eclipsed the northeastern seaboard as the focus of cultural activity. Artists sought to create a truly American expression within the confines of impressionism, modifying it in the service of rural interpretation. A major art colony emerged in Brown County, Indiana, and this Hoosier Group came to represent modernity in the center of the country.<sup>5</sup> Their influence was far reaching, extending throughout the Midwest and remaining for generations.

Also during this time, regional summer art schools made a significant contribution to the fabric of American art history, in addition to being an important factor in local economic revitalization. The origins of outdoor instruction date to the years following William Merritt Chase's visiting lectureship at the Art Institute of Chicago. Soon thereafter John H. Vanderpoel—a leading Art Institute School teacher—founded a colony in nearby Delavan, Wisconsin, modeled on Chase's Shinnecock Summer School. At about the same time, Eagle's Nest, a thirteen-acre site near Oregon, Illinois, quickly became known as the Barbizon of Chicago, with Lorado Taft, Charles F. Browne, Oliver Dennett Grover, Hamlin Garland, and Henry B. Fuller participating. The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was also an important catalyst for Carl Krafft, a participant in the colony in Brown County, Indiana, who in 1913 established the Society of Ozark Painters on the Gasconade and White rivers in the Missouri Ozarks. Frederick Fursman, an Art Institute faculty member, in 1910 established the Saugatuck Summer School in Michigan. Cone was also familiar with



*Myself, 1932*



Marvin D. Cone in Cedar Rapids, Summer 1933. Photograph by John W. Barry [1905-1988].



*Cloud Bank*, 1930



*Tranquility*, 1930-31

Charles Hawthorne's work in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Chase's efforts at Shinnecock, Long Island, and the thriving colonies in Rockport, Maine; Woodstock, New York; Taos, New Mexico; Eastport, Maine; New Hope, Pennsylvania; Old Lyme, Connecticut; the Roycroft Village, New York; the MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire; and the success of the Hoosier artists in Brown County. In each of these artists' colonies, the value of regional artistic traditions was readily understood. In fact, Grant Wood made direct reference to them in his introductory comments in the 1932 Stone City Colony brochure.

It was probably this traditional influence that had the greatest impact on Marvin Cone. He was painting the Iowa countryside by the late 1910s, at the same time that the Cedar Rapids Art Association was collecting works by followers of the Hoosier School. Cone's interest in local subjects continued through the 1920s and 1930s, coinciding with the dramatic surge of cultural nationalism that swept the country. During this time, Thomas Hart Benton, John Stuart Curry, and Grant Wood achieved national distinction for their regionally inspired paintings. Their representation of commonplace American scenes attracted considerable public attention, and their work collectively constitutes a poignant documentary of nationalistic ambitions. This triumvirate—like their predecessors—sought an art that was truly American, independent of Europe and readily associated with this environment. In general, Wood's and Benton's theories were important, but a decisive influence was Thomas Craven's propagandistic rhetoric. These individuals lectured extensively and were widely recognized, but by the mid-1930s, regionalism was an anachronism popularized by the media. Critics increasingly expressed weariness with the whole issue, and in many respects it had degenerated into a violent and divisive polemic.<sup>6</sup> Wood's 1931 essay *Revolt against the City*, for example, was more a response to an existing situation than a harbinger of a new movement. Similarly, the 1931 opening of the Whitney Museum of American Art was a response to an already active tradition.

If one considers American Scene painting—especially regionalism—as purely a response to a desire for an independent American art, then one must view it as a continuation of efforts initiated in the 1890s throughout the Midwest. Once again, writers had paved the way for greater public acceptance of things midwestern, and artists responded. While some considered regionalism a state of mind, others—like Wood in 1931—viewed it in more tech-

nical or stylistic terms. This explanation was problematic even for Wood, who was at times contradictory in his claim that he was revolting against abstract painting, not calling for a new style.<sup>7</sup> For Wood and others, the question involved a choice between the traditionalists and the modernists. The discussions continued for several decades, but the mainstream of American society was moving in a different direction.

As a movement, the American Scene is not easily defined. This is surprising, since the term infers a unified point of view. Technically, we are obliged to accept John I. H. Baur's conclusion that the term encompasses all the works of art that reflected this native environment.<sup>8</sup> And yet, in 1933, the American Scene was adopted as the theme of the government recuperative programs initiated in the wake of the Great Depression.<sup>9</sup> Although they were conceived to create jobs, by 1935 programs such as the WPA's Federal Art Project also reflected a widespread belief in the crucial role the arts could assume in contemporary society. As such, they answered the desire for a nationalistic art that could combat the Depression's deep psychological and social impact.

Since the government-initiated programs existed between 1933 and 1941-42, this period has served to demarcate both the predominant style and the active years of the American Scene movement. This neat categorization must be qualified, however. The innovative experiments of the modernists, although temporarily overshadowed, maintained a vitality in the work of artists such as Sheeler, Abraham Walkowitz, Arthur B. Dove, and Frank Stella. In retrospect, it was also during the early 1930s that the American Scene movement was popularized and the second wave of modernism took shape.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that in 1935, not only was the Federal Art Project officially established, but the Whitney Museum held a major exhibit of American abstract painting. In the next year, the major exhibitions organized by Alfred Barr at the Museum of Modern Art dealt with such movements as cubism, fantastic art, and surrealism.

In contrast, for a number of contemporary artists, such as Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper, and Marsden Hartley, painting remained a private enterprise that precluded description in social, political, or geographical terms. These artists sought to articulate an introspective vision of their own beings and their immediate surroundings. This was also Cone's intention from the late 1910s onward. It was not until the 1920s and 1930s, however, that this intention became clear. Cone's paintings of these

years reveal that the communication and the representation of individual experience constituted the essence of his pursuit. In his works, he explored and sought to express both the mystery of his own being and a tangible response to his daily existence. Marvin Cone's art was not an effort to record what surrounded him—as most regionalist painters sought to do—but a synthesis of his values and imagination and their relationship to his experiences. At the same time, Cone remained conscious of the role and responsibility of artists in their communities.

The sense of mystery in Cone's works of the 1930s is not a quality hidden in image, but a sincere revelation of his own understanding of people, places, and himself. For Cone, the choice was natural. His own experiences held a wealth of subjects to occupy a lifetime, but inevitably, an attitude of introspection or self-confrontation permeates his life's work from beginning to end. Through his painting, Cone in part compensated for the temporality of his own existence by fixing his identity within a context of inevitable change. His work is concerned with the important processes of human life—living, dying, loving, communicating—and he has succeeded in bringing that to us through his experience, his family, and the geographic location he knew best.<sup>11</sup>

Inevitably, Cone's association with Wood and his emphasis on a limited locale raises claims of regionalism. To be sure, many of his works demonstrate an affinity for the unassuming aspects of his surroundings. But to press this connection too far is an oversimplified conclusion that fails to establish concise distinctions between different approaches to realist painting.<sup>12</sup> Cone clearly did not consider himself a regionalist and should not be placed in this context. He was amused by the critical attention regionalism received. His realist pictures of Iowa landscapes certainly satisfied the expected criteria, but he frequently changed pictorial elements to achieve a better design. In fact, Cone was engaged in a decisive break with tradition. Perhaps a case can be made for his late 1910s-early 1920s influence on Wood's choice of a regional subject matter, but he also felt that the regionalist painters caricatured America, and he wanted to express himself. Throughout his work, Cone was able to distill a universal quality—poetic, romantic, lyric—from his surroundings. Unlike other strict regionalists, his chief objective was to increase our capacity for perception. A teacher at heart, Cone knew that the viewer, when looking at one of his works, would inevitably bring some personal memory to the experience, thereby increasing the impact of the painting.

Between 1930 and 1938, Cone concentrated on

the landscape of the Midwest, capturing the special nuances of the light and the complex formations of the land and sky. These scenes, which rarely include people, are reminiscent of the Iowa countryside but without topographic precision. To Cone, the landscape had a poignant reality that was nonetheless unpredictable and elusive. Nature's sublimity, more than its mere physical qualities, was his principal pursuit.

Cone's paintings of the 1930s epitomize the public perception of his work. In the stunning *Prelude* (1931, cat. no. 246), for instance, the colors are subtle and evocative in their suggestion of light, and a complex layering of forms gives depth to the rolling hills, the fields, and the trees in the landscape, as well as to the clouds in the huge expanse of sky. Cone had developed many of these same qualities in his paintings through the 1920s. While *Prelude* is a powerful statement about the mysteries of nature, it is also extremely personal in its sense of solitude and tranquility. A passage in Alexis de Tocqueville's 1831 *Journey to America* poignantly describes what Cone was trying to achieve:

*Who will ever paint a true picture of those rare moments in life when physical well-being prepares the way for calm of soul, and the universe seems before your eyes to have reached a perfect equilibrium; then the soul, half asleep, hovers between the present and the future, between the real and the possible, while with natural beauty all around and the air tranquil and mild, at peace, man listens to the even beating of his arteries that seems to him to mark the passage of time flowing drop by drop through eternity.*<sup>13</sup>

This quality of tranquility had inspired much of the nineteenth-century landscape painting, yet



*July Clouds, 1931*



*Prelude, 1931*



*Old Quarry*, 1933-34



The Cedar River Bend, 1935.  
Photograph by Marvin D. Cone.



*River Bend No. 2*, 1934-35. Pencil,  
5 x 6 inches.

Cone's paintings of the 1920s and 1930s were clearly modern and achieved a fresh perspective. If Cone in *Prelude* and other works shared with his fellow regional artists a search for cultural roots, he also saw his landscapes as optimistic symbols for a revitalized nation. Cone unconsciously was formulating a national artistic expression based on rural America.

The decade of the 1930s was one of tremendous activity for Marvin Cone. As his catalogue shows, he increasingly chose his subjects from two perspectives—their design potential and their challenge to his imagination. At the same time, his teaching duties had a substantial impact on his painting schedule. Although in the late 1920s Cone had been absorbed with graduate classes at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, he nevertheless had a great deal of time to paint.

From the 1930s on, this unfortunately was not the case. Cone's teaching duties began to consume four and a half days a week and about the same number of evenings. Most of the classes were lectures, requiring extensive preparation on Cone's part and resulting over the years in several thousand pages of notes. All of this activity kept Cone away from his painting, yet he was able to maintain an extraordinary exhibition schedule.<sup>14</sup>

In his native state, Cone was active with the Iowa Artists' Club and for many years was a key participant in the Iowa State Fair Exhibition. As might be expected, he did very well in these exhibits, often winning prizes or receiving favorable notice in the press. His work was also the subject of one-man exhibits at the Cedar Rapids Art Association or Coe College in 1931, 1933, 1934, and 1936.

Through Grant Wood, Cone in the early 1930s began an affiliation with the Chicago Galleries Association, a nonprofit group located at 220 North Michigan Avenue. His sales were not significant, but the relationship provided important encouragement. It prompted his submission of works to the competitive museum exhibitions that were then so popular. Cone was always reluctant to promote his own work, and he was not dependent on either a major patron or an individual dealer. This desire for independence was a characteristic many of his contemporaries shared.

From 1931 to 1934, Cone's work was rejected from several important annual exhibits at major museums, but beginning in 1936-37, things changed abruptly. A major solo exhibit of sixteen works was held at the Chicago Galleries Association. His work was accepted into the annual exhibits at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (*River*

*Bend No. 3*, 1935, cat. no. 316) and the Corcoran Gallery of Art (*River Hills*, 1936, cat. no. 321), and in 1936 New York's Walker Galleries included four of his works in a group exhibit. Altogether his work was included in about thirteen exhibitions over two years. Cone was attracting a wider following, receiving critical recognition, and selling paintings. His exhibition success is significant because it reflects contemporary reaction to his work and provides a context for appreciating his achievements. In spite of Cone's success, he seemed more driven by his own need to paint than by a need for material gratification. His priorities remained quite clear: his obligations were to his family, his students, and his painting, in that order.

Winnifred Cone recalls with some unwarranted dismay the time that Marvin spent on family matters. Invariably, the family would drive to Toronto during the summer to see Winnifred's family. Winnifred's sister had a cottage on Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto, where Cone created two small sculptures from the local stone. It was a long drive, and although they made periodic stops to visit museums, that was not the purpose of the trip. On only one occasion was Cone able to meet several artists who were in some respects Canadian counterparts to the American realists. The Group of Seven was a national movement in Canadian landscape painting that had come together in Toronto in about 1913.<sup>15</sup>

On many occasions during the 1930s, Marvin and Winnifred traveled the Iowa countryside looking for subjects—either good landscapes or tumbled-down old barns. She recalls that his practice varied. Sometimes he set up his easel and worked on a sketch in oil, or he made a quick pencil or charcoal sketch, intending to return the next day. He did subsequent work either in the studio or outdoors, applying oil pigments over the pencil or charcoal drawing on the stretched canvas. A painting was often left unfinished when he simply lost interest. He was inconsistent about signing works, even as they left for major exhibitions, and almost never dated them. He could execute a composition quickly when he had fully considered it, but he usually thought out a painting over a longer period before beginning even a drawing. Invariably, paintings intended for exhibition in competitive shows were painted indoors from sketches and from his imagination. These works are readily distinguishable by their large size. Cone also made a number of sketching trips with his good friend Grant Wood. They had both enjoyed these excursions since the late 1910s. In the early to mid-1930s, Wood seemed

## STONE CITY — 1932-1933

more inclined to work on oil sketches outdoors. A small number of these exquisite sketches of the Iowa countryside have survived, providing an interesting and important perspective on Wood's mature style.<sup>16</sup>

This penchant for outdoor sketching was especially evident in Wood's involvement with the Stone City Art Colony. Located in the valley of the Wapsipinicon River, twenty-six miles from Cedar Rapids and three miles from Anamosa, Stone City was described in the colony's prospectus as the essence of Iowa and "the most characteristic and paintable mid-western landscape, prairie, high bluffs, winding streams, woods, plains, farms and country towns." Indeed, outdoor summer teaching was the cornerstone of the short-lived colony, as it had been in the 1890s and the 1900s for the Hoosier Group. For eight weeks during the summers of 1932 and 1933, both Cone and Wood were instrumental in this school, which was a project of the Cedar Rapids Art Association under the leadership of Little Gallery director Edward B. Rowan. It was founded with a Carnegie Foundation grant, supported financially by Cedar Rapidians, and accredited by Coe College. Grant Wood summarized the objective of the colony this way:

*It seems to me that we need, this year, especially, a combination camp and summer art school within this section of the Middle West. The mountain and sea-side colonies are too expensive, and too far away for the year 1932.*

*This Middle-West section is not as obvious as Taos, Brown County, or the coast of Maine, but neither is it covered with the palette scrapings of previous painters. To those willing to observe and think for themselves, instead of merely repeating what has already been said, this territory offers new and very usable material.*

*My faith in middle-western material is not based alone upon its being fresh and unused, and does not proceed from any "booster spirit" for any particular locality, but is founded upon the conviction that a true art expression must grow up from the soil itself.*

*In referring to middle-western material, I do not at all mean an endless succession of red barns, silos, and corn shocks; but rather a subtle quality that extends over a large but quite homogenous area, and that manifests itself in a thousand elusive but significant ways. This country has real character that has sometimes been expressed by our writers, but has not, as yet, been caught by our painters.<sup>17</sup>*

In simple terms, the colony sought to show aspiring artists and the general public that the Midwest had a wealth of picturesque material. It was not



Panoramic View of Stone City, Iowa. c. 1932.



Marvin D. Cone on Ice Wagon Decorated by Grant Wood, Stone City Art Colony, 1932-1933. Photograph by Grant Wood.



Hubbard Ice Company Wagons at Stone City Art Colony, 1932-1933. Photograph by John W. Barry [1905-1988].



Marvin D. Cone with sketching class in Viola, Iowa, 1932. Photograph by John W. Barry [1905-1988].

PUBLIC  
**AUCTION**

Our term being ended, we will offer for sale at public auction on the premises of the Green Mansion, now known as the Stone City Art Colony, at Stone City, Iowa, the following described properties on:

**August 7, 1932**

Commencing at 3:00 sharp

10 - Red Barns - 10 Some with silos, windmills and out buildings rendered in oil and watercolor	8 - Frame Houses - 8 In various conditions and styles of architecture built in stone masonry and in color
70 - Acres - 70 One in block in all sections	65 - Acres - 65 Young Corn, Winding Roads, Dakota Hills, and sections of Iowa machinery too numerous to mention

Sold Subject to U. S. S. of Anamosa and Program of 639

—Terms Made Known on Day of Sale—

**Stone City Art Colony**  
Stone City, Jones County, Iowa  
a success of water, scenery  
Regular 10c Admission to Colony Grounds

Auction Poster, Stone City Art Colony, 1932.



River Bend, 1935



River Bend No. 3, 1935



River Hills, 1936



River Bend No. 5, 1938

necessary to travel to Europe, since equally desirable subjects could be found in Iowa. Wood went on to say in the 1933 brochure:

*If American art is to be elevated to the stature of a true cultural expression it cannot remain a mere reflection of foreign painting. A national expression cannot be built upon the activity of a few solitary individuals or be isolated in a few tourist-ridden localities or metropolitan centers. It must take group form from the more genuine and less spectacular regions.*

*It is our belief that a true art expression must grow up from the environment itself. Then an American art will arrive through the fusion of various regional expressions based on a thorough analysis of what is significant to these regions. Stone City Colony has this for its objective.<sup>18</sup>*

It is precisely this quality that both artists captured on their numerous sketching trips and that Wood is best known for today. Unfortunately, the economic impact of the Depression forced Stone City to close after only two summers. Through the 1930s, the Stone City area continued to provide an important setting for many of Cone's best paintings, since the family summered there with the Paul Engles.<sup>19</sup>

At about the same time in the early 1930s, Cone was interviewed for an article in the Coe College *Cosmos*. In part, he said:

*Art is one's reaction to his surroundings. It may be only a new light thrown upon something that before seemed insignificant. In a landscape it may be only a new slant upon a familiar scene, or in still life it may be a new arrangement of figures or color . . . There are many advantages in the study of still life . . . The charm of still life lies in the greater chance of expression. Still life offers to the painter a greater choice in color; background, perspective, and light . . . The life blood of art lies in the fact that no two people react to their surroundings in the same way . . . Art is not didactic, moral or religious; its chief mission is to give enjoyment and to enhance the value and appreciation of life.<sup>20</sup>*

On other occasions he noted:

*Design is the basis of all the arts. It is the painter's method of communication. Line is the edge of form—the last place where the light connects with form.<sup>21</sup>*

*Paintings are records of experiences.<sup>22</sup>*

*Human personality (spirit)—the most wonderful and valuable thing in the world . . . A man's spirit is embodied in what he creates. Art lives and grows through new experiences or new reactions to old experiences of new human beings.<sup>23</sup>*

These statements provide an illuminating insight into Cone's motivations as a painter. They also show that his intentions had not really changed since the late 1910s. He vigorously absorbed and was excited by the changes in the art world around him, yet he somehow remained steadfast in his determination to paint for himself and not for a buying audience. In the late 1920s, to considerable criticism, he had abandoned his beautiful pictures of clouds for still lifes. About as suddenly in 1935—a year after he was appointed a full professor of art at Coe College—he again changed direction. During a picnic on the bluffs above the Cedar River north of Cedar Rapids, Cone did a series of pencil sketches that evolved into a finished painting in less than a month. He also used various other locations along the Cedar River south of town, striving for a collective portrait, not geographic specificity.<sup>24</sup>

The painting, appropriately called *River Bend* (1935, cat. no. 308), was an immediate success, and it was one of a series of about fifteen works on the same theme completed between 1935 and 1940.<sup>25</sup> As a group, the works are quite different. Each represents a complete thought, showing no relationship to either earlier or later works. In every case, the works are finely balanced, with striking color harmonies that range in the earliest landscapes from a precise hard-edge effect with dark tonalities to a softly contoured landscape with light tonal effects. The early works, such as *Rolling Country* (1934, cat. no. 302), *River Bend No. 2* (1935, cat. no. 315), *River Bend No. 3* (1935, cat. no. 316), *River Hills* (1936, cat. no. 321), and *River Bluffs* (1936, cat. no. 330), are characterized by flattened color masses that approach a semi-abstract design. Others, such as *Hills of Iowa* (1937, cat. no. 333), *Valley Road* (1937, cat. no. 334), and *Yellow Hills* (1938-39, cat. no. 342), are considerably lighter in color and have an overall softness. A critic for the *Chicago Tribune* described these as "smooth, tranquil, polished, and exquisite. They remind one of early Italian landscapes. The drawing in them is as gentle and restrained as it is accurate."<sup>26</sup> Surprisingly, in at least one news article, a critic reported public reaction that *River Bend* was a radical work painted in a revolutionary mood.<sup>27</sup> Cone was amused by this response, and it probably influenced his experimentation with the subject matter.

The River Bend landscapes sought a precise balance between rendering specific geographic reference and evoking a generalized response to a scene. They also have a strong lateral expansion. The main horizontal lines are carried without inter-

ruption to the edge of the picture, serving to heighten the viewer's awareness of what goes beyond the limitations of the canvas. Contemporary critics praised the River Bend paintings for their bold geographic form and their modern aesthetic.<sup>28</sup> In these landscapes, and later in his room paintings, Cone truly created an eternal vision safe from the changes of time, a quality of transience in permanence. He has eliminated the distraction of human pressure, while in a sparse image he has idealized the beautiful, unassuming Iowa countryside. These paintings propose an aesthetic based on the observation of the real world that serves as a bridge between naturalism or realism and symbolism or abstraction. Consistently, a silence and a stillness prevail; time seems unnaturally suspended. The paintings are characterized by a sense of tension, an introspective solitude. Especially in the later works, Cone has paid almost obsessive attention to the subtle tonal gradations, heightening our awareness of a reality beyond the scene. The landscape remains austere, devoid of picturesque sentimentality. Through his synthesis of the classic landscape, his elimination of nonessential details, and his overall harmony, he has idealized the present. This motif, like his earlier clouds, somehow became his personal vehicle for introspection. This pursuit would occupy Cone for most of the years to come.

By March 1935, Cone was also receiving praise for a new series of brightly personal, amusing, and satirical character studies.<sup>29</sup> He was not usually interested in depicting people, but when he did, the results were extraordinary paintings of great

human interest. The unfinished canvas *Waiting for the Parade* (1934-35, cat. no. 305) is representative of this group, which are based on circus and carnival events. Cone's records indicate that he completed at least thirteen of these wonderful paintings.<sup>30</sup> As with the River Bend scenes, Cone completed these in his studio, working from small idea sketches usually made directly on the canvas. It is obvious that he enjoyed them, as he periodically included a self-portrait, but he always allowed the viewer to assume his position. Since his youth, Cone had been fascinated by the spectacle of the circus and the carnival. He frequently took photographs of his visits to the circus with Winnifred and Doris, and he lamented the day when the circus parade no longer came to Cedar Rapids. The whimsical appeal of the pageantry especially captivated him, and the circus posed interesting design problems as well. He pursued a use of ovoid forms and their relationship in space that was similar to the work of his contemporaries Kenneth Hayes Miller and Edward Laning. The circus paintings also reflect an uncomfortable, tenuous balance between realism and abstraction, continuing the introspective quality found in much of Cone's work. Several of these paintings were exhibited in 1937 at New York's Walker Gallery, with John Steuart Curry and Hobson Pittman. Cone remained affiliated with the gallery for a number of years and briefly considered joining Associated American Artists, but the poor sales prospects of the late 1930s and early 1940s finally discouraged any formal affiliation.



*Snake Charmer, 1935*



*Allow Your Minds to Broaden and Expand, 1938-39*



*Merry-Go-Round, 1934*

*Waiting for the Parade, 1934-35*



*The Circus in Cedar Rapids, 1930s. Photograph by Marvin D. Cone.*



*Habitation*, 1938-39



## CHAPTER 4

During the 1938-39 academic year, Cone took a leave of absence from his heavy teaching duties at Coe College. This leave was made possible by about thirty Cedar Rapidsians who were organized by his good friend David Turner. They guaranteed Cone's salary in exchange for works that he would complete. In a letter dated 4 June 1938, David Turner and W. R. Boyd informed Cone of the terms:

*Your friends and those interested in your success have at the present time paid in full, or have signed the following agreement to the amount of \$3,710.00.*

*In an effort to help Marvin Cone to become a great painter by financing him for one year so that he may devote his entire time to his art, I or we agree to pay \$ \_\_\_\_\_. This fund is to be managed by W. R. Boyd and David Turner.*

*It is thoroughly understood that every picture that Mr. Cone paints from August 1, 1938 and August 1, 1939 will belong to the group that has helped to finance this project. If and when these pictures are sold by instruction of a majority of the donors, the money thus received will be returned. If the pictures sell for more than the amount invested, the additional money will be given to Mr. Cone.*

*These are the people who have been glad to advance the money and who wish you a wonderful year in which to be free to paint to your heart's content.<sup>1</sup>*

Cone termed it "a year of freedom," and the opportunity proved a tremendous catalyst to his painting. It would also be the only time that he would be able to devote an uninterrupted year to his work. Cone was always grateful to the community for making this possible. In an isolated downtown studio in the Granby Building, Cone set about his task in typical fashion. Dressed in a coat and tie, he arrived at 9:00 a.m. each day so that he could always paint in sunlight. This pattern continued from August 1938 to May 1939; even his best friends did not know his studio's location. Marvin and Winnifred then traveled for two months to Mexico, where he found an environment very much to his liking. He completed sixteen works that were included in his highly publicized and successful 1

November 1939 auction at the Cedar Rapids Art Association.<sup>2</sup>

Cone thrived in his studio, creating one distinguished work after another. This was not entirely surprising, since he had a ready agenda of works that he wanted to finish. He also actively participated in several invitational and competitive exhibitions, held one-man exhibits at Coe College and the University of Iowa, and generally was a familiar figure among his colleagues.

At the same time, Cone's subject matter became more diverse, including not only his characteristic landscapes, but also haunting interiors with ghosts, stairs, and doors. Among the works created during this period were *Triptych Panorama* (1938, cat. no. 337), *There's the Old Gent Again* (1938-39, cat. no. 354), *Anniversary* (1938-39, cat. no. 356), *Old Iowa Barn* (1938-39, cat. no. 364), *Farm Life* (1938-39, cat. no. 367), and *Prairie Parallels* (1939, cat. no. 371).<sup>3</sup> Cone preferred his solitude, so it is logical that he would become fascinated with the abstract qualities of interior architectural spaces, the geometric, measured progression of stairs, and the formal shapes of windows and doors. Just as Milton Avery and Charles Sheeler were attracted to this subject, Cone liked it for its potentially formal coloristic and spatial relationships. This desire to change his subject matter suggests that Cone was not guided by a philosophy of cultural isolationism. Unlike Benton,



Marvin D. Cone in his Granby Building Studio, Cedar Rapids, 1939.



*Anniversary*, 1938-39

Cedar Rapids Art Association Auction of Marvin D. Cone paintings, November 1939.



*Triptych Panorama*, 1938



*Farm Life*, 1938-39



*From Iowa*, 1940

The Cone Family  
in Cedar Rapids, 1938.



Curry, and Wood, he recognized the limitation of dealing with an isolated segment of geography in lieu of more universal subjects. Each of these artists readily embraced lithography as a means to enhance their public outreach, but Cone did not. Although he was frequently exposed to the technique, he never tried it and worried that Wood was being distracted from his painting because of it.

Cone was still concerned with being a distinguished community artist, a concept often associated today with regionalism. During the late 1930s and early 1940s he deliberately tried to capture what he felt was a rapidly disappearing aspect of the Iowa countryside. In 1939 he painted *Old Iowa Barn* (cat. no. 364), perhaps the most popular work in his art association auction. The reception was predictably enthusiastic, and Cone found himself in the position of responding to friends who wanted what they considered a "classic Cone." Cone then proceeded to develop this subject matter in a number of paintings done specifically for exhibitions. These included *Farm Life* (1938-39, cat. no. 367), *Cook's Barn No. 1* (1939-40, cat. no. 396), *Connor's Barn* (1940, cat. no. 404), *From Iowa* (1940, cat. no. 405), *Two Barns* (1941, cat. no. 411), *Lafayette Farm* (1942, cat. no. 422), *Otis Tuttle's Barn* (1945, cat. no. 452), *White Pennsylvania Barn* (1948, cat. no. 483), and *Toddville Barn* (1953, cat. no. 520). He continued to paint the Iowa countryside until about 1957. When he started painting farm scenes, many of the barns were more than eighty years old and were quickly being replaced by modern, more efficient buildings. For this reason, these works were Cone's closest attempts at documenting or romanticizing the Iowa farm. They are curiously similar to his other contemporary paintings of interiors in several respects. Both subjects are usually devoid of the transient distraction of human presence, and both are carefully structured and geometrically ordered. In his choice

of subject, Cone demonstrates his strong preference for compositional challenge and the potential for an interesting design that similarly displays his technical skill.

After working eight hours at his painting, Cone's favorite relaxation usually consisted of reading books about mountain climbing—which he never experienced—or mystery and detective stories. He had an extensive library on both subjects, which appear as themes in his work. In 1930, when visiting his father in Seattle, he did a small painting of Mt. Rainier that he always kept for personal enjoyment. His interest in ghosts led him to consider *Anniversary* (1938, cat. no. 356) among his best imaginative works of 1938. Painted with only black, white, yellow, and the resulting blends of greens, this work posed a considerable technical and compositional challenge. A sense of calm prevails because all potentially disturbing color contrasts have been eliminated. Cone's satisfaction was that he had both created a pleasing painting and solved a difficult design problem.

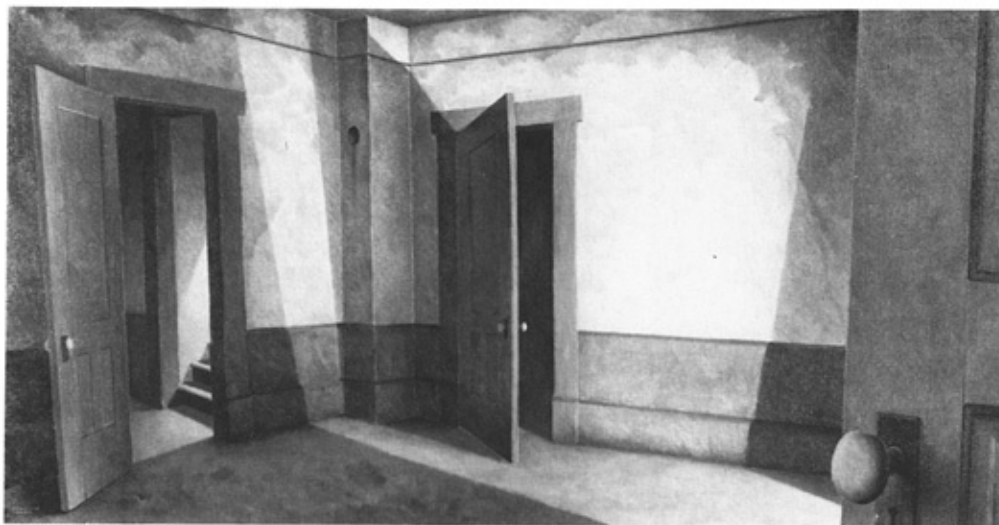
Cone enjoyed the technical possibilities his subjects presented. He frequently made preliminary drawings that verify his gradual process of simplification. With the exception of his still lifes, these drawings were the earliest examples in which Cone isolated structural forms such as staircases from their surroundings. The staircase was a persistent theme in Charles Sheeler's work, as well as a favorite surrealist motif.<sup>4</sup> Cone had seen Sheeler's October 1939 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, was clearly aware of his 1914-15 Doylestown, Pennsylvania, photographs and those of Williamsburg from 1935-36, and was intrigued by the enigmatic aspects of his staircases.

Cone pursued his interest in structural form through a series of works dealing with interior spaces. He was an extremely introspective person, so it is not surprising that he was fascinated by the inner recesses of his own and other homes. For him, the interior space of the canvas was a symbolic retreat from the outside world. It was in some respects his inner sanctum, imbued with memories of the past. Cone remained intrigued with this motif for more than twenty years, creating at least as many paintings. He was obviously pleased with them, because in 1943, at the invitation of Dorothy Miller, he intended to submit five paintings for consideration in the upcoming exhibition *American Realists and Magic Realists* at the Museum of Modern Art: *Anniversary*, *There's the Old Gent Again*, *Habitation* (1938-39, cat. no. 343), *Appointed Room* (1940, cat. no. 406), and *Uncle Ben* (1942, cat. no. 415).

Collectively, these paintings sustain several interesting transitions and seem to be an emblem of Cone's introspective self. They are especially thought provoking when we realize that his scenes of interior spaces began in 1939 with *Habitation* and continued until *Four Fragments* (1964, cat. no. 637). A survey reveals that Cone's gradual process of simplification emphasized an aesthetic of austerity that became progressively more vigorous. Cone defined his interior space by the geometry of the walls and the vibrating light. In the interiors, he played vertical against horizontal and two-dimensional confinement against spatial illusion, unifying the total composition with subtle tonal gradations. He clearly preferred a system of simplified, precisely delineated forms and flattened color contrasts. The hues are closely allied and the values equalized so that the overall intensity is quite similar. *Habitation* is the earliest and among the best of the interior paintings. Clearly conceived, it contains many of the elements that Cone would subsequently pursue—the windows to the outside, the interior room devoid of human presence, and a stairway to an unknown space. The room is filled with a quality of light that further serves as a visual symbol for introspection.

Cone concurrently worked on several paintings that, while related, offer interesting differences. After *Habitation*, he introduced a spirit or ghost. In *The Watcher* (1947, cat. no. 464), *There's the Old Gent Again*, and *Anniversary*, the spirit is taking refuge in the seclusion and solitude of the room. Cone's playful sense of humor may have strangely influenced his desire to work on this variation on his well-received interior motif. Curiously, after his initial success, he did not return to this type of interior scene until 1941-42, when he introduced the solitary portrait of his uncle on the wall. In carrying this theme further, he arrived at a poignant imagery. In *Night Prowler* (1941, cat. no. 413) and *Uncle Ben*, the room projects a sense of someone's recent departure and an uneasy expectation of their return. The tension is further heightened in *Uncle Ben* by the vestige of a complete human drama that remains on the walls. Cone enjoyed the enigma of the peering portrait, and he returned to it in *Uncle Ben Again* (1945, cat. no. 451), *Old Tenant* (1945, cat. no. 454), *Dear Departed* (1946, cat. no. 459), and *Strange Vigil* (1946, cat. no. 463). Cone commented:

*Painted from composite memories, Dear Departed is one of a series of gloomy interiors suggesting the eerie half-fearsome sensations toward the unknown which a small boy, and even an adult enjoys while exploring abandoned houses. The composition, which started as*



*The Appointed Room*, 1940

*Night Prowler*, 1941





*Uncle Ben Again*, 1945

*an abstraction, and the color values were developed to help establish a lonesome and apprehensive atmosphere. The little portrait, besides playing its part in the pattern, suggests a probable former tenant—(who, I hope, is still not around!).*

What distinguishes Cone's interior paintings from similar treatments by other artists is that they lack not only a human figure in the act of contemplation, but also the customary furnishings. There is no traditional romantic figure at an open window, longing for freedom or contemplating the unknown. Instead, the viewer is left in dreamy emptiness. The ethereal and thought-provoking quality of the interior space is heightened by the pervasive sunlight filtering through the room. The prevailing silence and stillness is disturbing, since time seems unnaturally suspended. Ultimately, the viewer is



*This Was Doubtless He*, 1946

*Dear Departed*, 1946



keenly aware that the room was previously animated by a human drama, and a nostalgia from this presence fills the space. Functionally and aesthetically, these works were based on Cone's observations of the real world, and they served as a transition between his earlier naturalism and his emerging abstraction. As he had said in 1938:

*The purpose of art is not to reproduce life, but to present an editorial, a comment on life . . . The artist does not set out to imitate nature. What would be the purpose of that? Let the camera with its clever mechanism imitate. Art, such as poetry, music, and painting, is simply a portion of the experience of the artist. When we actually see ideals, they become real to us. Art traces an abstraction and makes it audible or visual. It symbolizes the whole of life. We believe in something we can see.<sup>6</sup>*

Cone frankly and frequently admitted that he abandoned subjects after he felt that he had accomplished as much as he had set out to accomplish. This is precisely why he consecutively abandoned his clouded landscapes for still-lives, his panoramic landscapes for barns, and all of these for his haunted interiors. In 1947, Cone wrote:

*Everyone changes with the passing of time. Not only are our physical bodies modified, but our reactions to environment are altered, our mental outlook takes new directions, we communicate and assimilate, we become interested in different things, our youthful likes often become dislikes as adults, and our sense of values shifts inevitably with time.<sup>7</sup>*

One thing did not change; earlier in the same year Cone commented on his continued teaching responsibilities of four and a half days a week and four evenings.<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, Cone's paintings underwent significant changes in subject matter, but from his early landscapes to his interiors, he consistently strove to evoke his inner feelings. After his poetic scenes from the 1920s, his stunning achievements such as *Prelude* of 1931 and *Dear Departed* of 1946 merely serve to reinforce this direction. At the same time, the *American Art Today* exhibition at the 1939 New York World's Fair confirmed this introspective tendency. Realism rather than modernism temporarily remained the dominant popular artistic style, but it was becoming more interpretive and psychological.<sup>9</sup> For many artists, nature was becoming more a source of forms, color, and spatial relationships than a source for realist painting. Cone addressed this changing perspective when he commented in November 1944:

*The fine arts . . . function primarily in the field of the human spirit. As the spiritual heritage of the race they define man, bring him into focus. They disclose human beings at their best, uncover the potentialities of mind and spirit and the wide range of insight with which all men, in some measure, are endowed . . . The arts are the best analysis man has of himself.*<sup>10</sup>

There was an abrupt change during the post-war years, as painting suddenly demanded an international perspective that it had never merited before. Robert Rosenblum has described another change: "By 1945, after Hiroshima, this worship of primeval nature reached even more mythic extremes, as if after the apocalypse, the Abstract Expressionists needed to reexperience the first days of creation, turning as they did to images of molten energies, unformed matter, lambent voids."<sup>11</sup>

As we have seen, this change was reflected in Cone's suggestive abstractions of muted color and simplified forms. The works were a powerful statement of the artist's inner feelings and the mystery of life. They have a visionary quality and an unresolved tension that heightens our awareness of an unseen reality. The only vestige of human presence is the frequent portrait on the wall, so that the viewer immediately becomes lost in the dream and contemplates the emptiness. For Marvin Cone, these scenes were nostalgic encounters with his memories and eternalized visions safe from the changes of time. Aesthetically, his interiors were a bridge between realism and abstraction. It is curious that the strange, haunting openness of his room paintings was a quality that European critics would associate in the 1950s with the abstract expressionist movement and compare to the awesome physical size of this country.<sup>12</sup>



*The Watcher, 1947*



*Self-Portrait with Doris, 1948*



*Strange Vigil, 1946*



*I Have Loved the Unloved, 1948*



*Houses that Jack Built, 1960*

## CHAPTER 5

Marvin Cone continued to pursue his inner vision in the 1950s, attempting what William Cullen Bryant once called “a sincere communication of his own moral and intellectual being.”<sup>1</sup> This pursuit brought Cone to a new stylistic conclusion. His absorption with nature and his awareness of contemporary stylistic trends inevitably led him to a nonrealist aesthetic. One art historian has described the evolution of abstraction this way:

*Nature was perceived as a reflection of self rather than a manifestation of imminent divinity. For the twentieth-century artist nature was no longer an end but an intellectual means. Given his identification of self with nature and his perception of the development of twentieth-century European art and philosophy, it was inevitable that he should eventually state his work in abstract terms.*<sup>2</sup>

Critical enthusiasm and a supportive art market assured the dominance of abstraction and quickly overshadowed the achievements of many realist artists.<sup>3</sup> In fact, many of these artists viewed the ascendancy of abstraction in the context of a confrontation with realist painting.

Cone did not share these sentiments. Instead, the transition was a logical continuation of his early explorations. Cone enthusiastically embraced the emergence and widespread acceptance of abstract expressionism. For him, abstraction did not pose a stylistic dilemma; rather, it provided a mode of expression ideally suited to his temperament. The overall design of a painting was always of paramount concern to Cone, who would not have described his work in realist terms. As early as his splendid *Cloud Bank—Evening* (1916-17, cat. no. 20), the simplified colors and flat planes already approached an abstract sensibility. This quality is present in much of his later work. For most of his life, from 1915 to 1950, Cone dealt with specific pictorial situations that only a modified realism could portray. After 1950, a realist style as such was not necessary to convey what was a more psychological and cosmological intention.

Few significant events occurred in Cone's pro-

fessional life in the 1950s, as he seemed to simply work at his teaching and painting. At the end of 1953 he was appointed chairman of the Coe College Art Department, and in the same year, with the help of his close friend Edmund Whiting (1918-75), he finally built a studio onto his home. Cone did not abandon his earlier interest in interiors or other realist subjects. He completed *Three Doorways* (1951, cat. no. 502), *Night Adventure* (1951, cat. no. 503), and *Four Exits* (1954, cat. no. 529), and he also turned to a related design challenge in *Blue Stairs No. 1* (1951, cat. no. 505), *Uncle Ben* (1951, cat. no. 506), *Blue Stair with Ancestor* (1951, cat. no. 507), *Attic Stairs* (1952, cat. no. 509), *Fourth Flight* (1954, cat. no. 527), and others. He also returned to paint several excellent scenes of his Iowa surroundings, including *Toddville Barn* (1953, cat. no. 520), and *Red Barn* (1953, cat. no. 522).<sup>4</sup> In spite of these changes, Cone's purpose in painting was consistent. He viewed his art as a vehicle communicating his feelings about the meaning of life and his own being.

These introspective qualities, as well as a direct similarity to the new style of painting, can be found in his paintings of this period—*Inner Light* (1950, cat. no. 497), *Pattern of Rectangles* (1957, cat. no. 554), and *Enigma* (1961, cat. no. 596). Even the titles of some of the 1950s and 1960s works betray their intended purpose. Once again, it is important to acknowledge that although the work is stylistically distinct, it does not represent a break with tradition. Cone and other artists did not turn their backs on earlier American painting. But an important change had occurred. Nature was no longer a transcendent experience in itself; it was also an important source of forms and colors.<sup>5</sup>

Cone was attracted to an abstract aesthetic because of its emphasis on design and imagination.<sup>6</sup> Arshile Gorky, a contemporary, commented on abstraction in terms that Cone clearly shared:

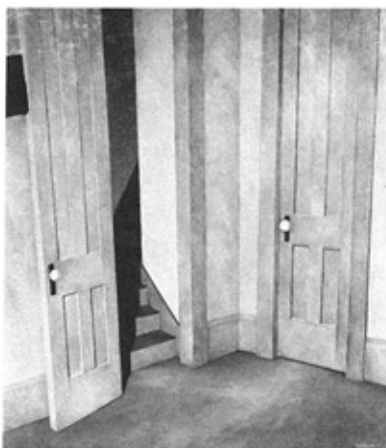
Abstraction is the key factor of the creative imagination . . . and . . . enables man to break the finite barrier and enter into infinity . . . It is the probing vehicle, the progressive thrust toward higher civilization. Mere realistic art is therefore



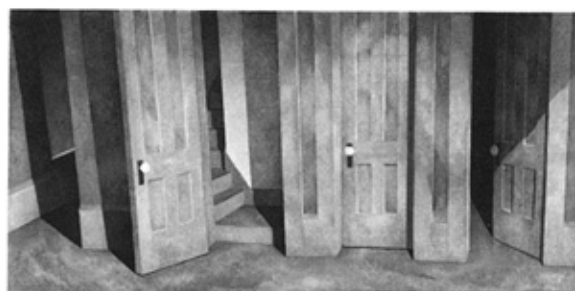
*The Way I Feel*, 1952



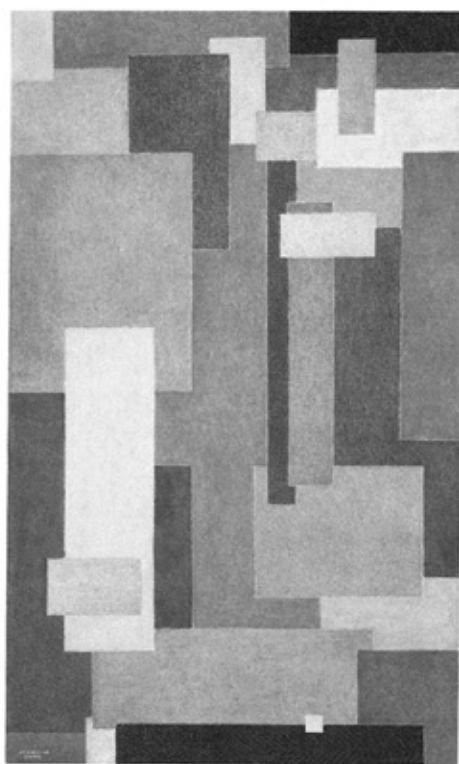
Marvin Cone with his grandchildren Stephen, Sheila and Winnifred Weeks, 1959. Photograph by Joan Liffring-Zug.



*Attic Stairs, 1952*



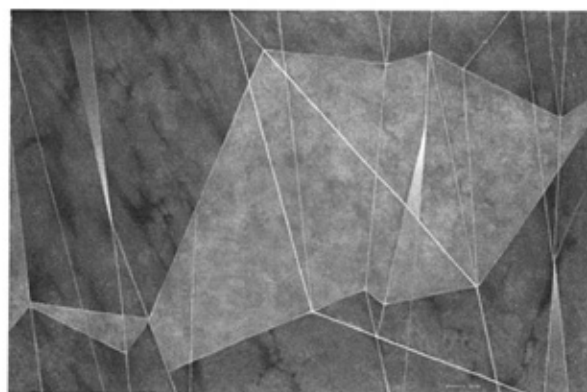
*The Four Exits, 1954*



*Pattern of Rectangles, 1957*



Marvin D. Cone at Coe College, late 1940s. Photograph by George T. Henry.



*Golden Object Suspended, 1959*

finite and limits man only to the perception of his physical eyes. Namely, that which is tangible. Abstract art enables the artist to perceive beyond the tangible, to extract the infinite out of the finite. It is the emancipator of the mind. It is an exploration into unknown areas.<sup>7</sup>

At about the same time, Charles Sheeler wrote: "All nature has an underlying abstract structure and it is within the province of the artist to search for it and to select and rearrange the forms for the enhancement of his design."<sup>8</sup> He went on to state in terms vividly sympathetic to Cone's that "design, in the larger sense, comprised the structure of a picture . . . Forms must be placed with primary consideration for their relation to all other forms . . . in the matter of their bulk, color or direction of movement, if the picture as a conception is to achieve an architecture-like structure."<sup>9</sup> For Cone, abstraction expressed in concrete terms the sentiments and artistic searchings that had preoccupied him for much of his life.

In 1960—the same year as his retirement from teaching at Coe College—Cone initiated a series of four works done through 1964 called *House(s) that Jack Built* (1960, cat. nos. 592 and 595; 1962, cat. no. 607; 1964, cat. no. 639). These directly relate to a 1928 painting (cat. no. 166) and a wooden construction that was originally intended as a toy for his daughter but was included in a contemporary exhibition. These imaginative creations gave Cone a great deal of enjoyment, and the rich personal association he experienced was evident in his desire to paint similar examples for close friends and family members. Cone's earlier motifs recurred in 1964 with his splendid painting *Four Fragments* (cat. no. 637), in which he returned to his haunting interiors for inspiration to create an innovative and powerful composition. As this and other works show, the facts of nature—its structure and its appeal to his reason—provided Cone with a wealth of beautiful and meaningful subjects. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, his moods and feelings grew more generalized, and he displayed a singular absorption with the future, probing the secrets of life, nature, and the world of the spirit.

Cone's 1960 appointment as artist-in-residence at Coe College was an important catalyst in this pursuit.<sup>10</sup> For the next three years he was free from financial concerns, so he was able to explore the intricacies of his own being for the first time since his 1938-39 sabbatical. In a brief passage dated 14 November 1963, Cone summarized his purpose in painting as "to somehow personalize myself on canvas," and went on to say, in terms reminiscent of



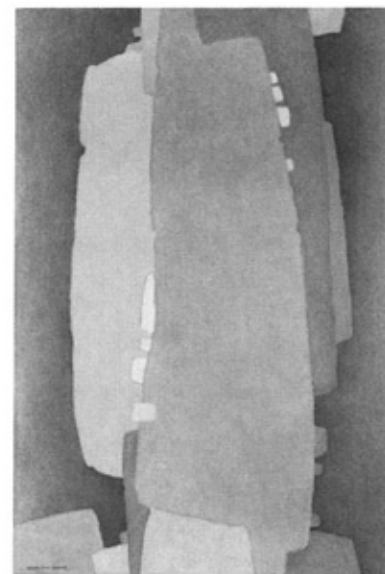
all his writings, that his was “an attempt to convey the impression of reality of spirit rather than the reality of visible nature.”<sup>11</sup> Cone’s eloquent passage from 1947 had summarized his enduring purpose and legacy and is worth repeating: “A great work of art . . . is a moving communication from an artist to a spectator. Therefore, when you look at a painting, don’t worry too much about what it *represents*, but look rather for the nature of the man who painted it—his spirit and fire.”<sup>12</sup>

A gentle aura permeated Cone’s works in these later years, as he responded to his situation in an extremely private and subjective way. Cone always viewed his art as a highly personal endeavor, and as such, his purpose in painting never changed. A number of his early clouded landscapes possess a comparable quality that characterized his later works, a quality of continuity and permanence in spite of human mortality. This is not to say that his technical skills faltered; on the contrary, he created some of his most powerfully evocative paintings during this time. Cone seemed aware that he had arrived at his preferred style, confident of what he wanted to express, and content with his human transience. Ultimately, it is evident that many of the works of this period were not only visual representations of Cone’s lifelong quest for a definition of nature, but also of nature’s relationship to his own being.

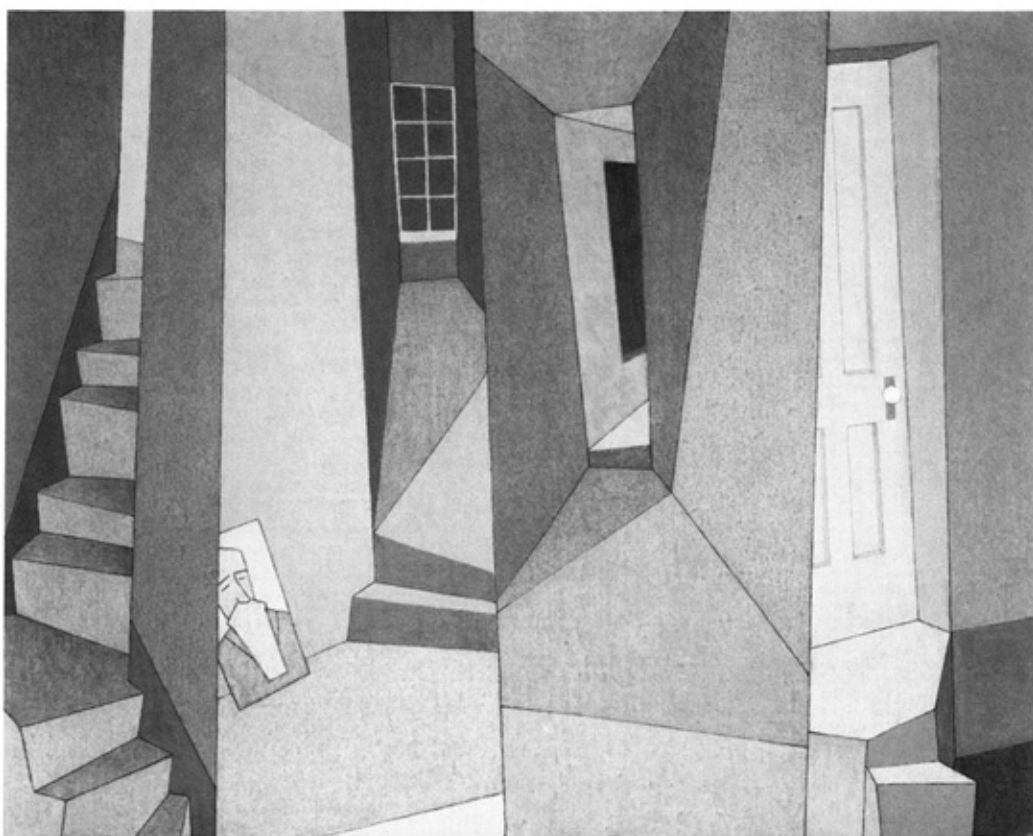
Marvin Cone was well known to his contemporaries through his association with Grant Wood, his active participation in national competitions, and his involvement in founding and running the Stone City Art Colony. But unlike many artists of the 1930s, Cone sought not to create a documentary or realistic depiction of the rural landscape, but rather to evoke his inner vision of nature and his own being. Paintings that even remotely approach a “regionalist” spirit represent a small part of his life’s work. To Cone, nature was a vehicle for revealing certain truths, and its universality provided an inexhaustible supply of inspiration. His paintings were conceived by a complex process that integrated first-hand observation of nature with the artist’s memories and feelings about what he had seen. They exhibit a creative synthesis with meaning that transcends simple representation.

Today, it is Cone’s art that portrays his essence as an individual, and it is clear that his concern was with timeless issues. He presents a highly personal memoir of a life affected by private and public demands, but still poignantly reveals what it means

to be an individual. Beginning with his earliest paintings of clouded landscapes and continuing through his striking abstractions, Cone strove to get at the meaning of his subject by selection, elimination, and emphasis of design details. In allowing the specific reference to give way to an enigmatic and transitory allusion, Cone bestowed on his works a suspended calm. The poet Paul Engle wrote about this quality: “He stares at the world with his hands . . . He has the painter’s second sight, the form seen once, and then again, after the imagination has redefined it.”<sup>13</sup> Cone’s life was as much an accomplishment as his art, but the artist would probably consider his devotion to his family, his friends, and his community—the core of his existence and of what he accomplished for others—to be the most enduring achievements of his life.



*Enigma, 1961*



*Four Fragments, 1964*

# N O T E S

## Chapter 1

1. Manuscript dated 1947, Marvin D. Cone Archives, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. All manuscripts cited are held in the Cone Archives.
2. William Whitney Cone, *Some Account of the Cone Family in America* (Topeka, Kans.: Crane and Co., 1903). This information is supplemented by numerous newspaper clippings and Cone's notes concerning his family.
3. This information and other personal comments came from many interviews with Winnifred Cone between 1981 and 1988.
4. It is interesting to see how Cone's handling of this series evolved over a period of about ten years, from the generic ghost in *Anniversary* (1938-39, cat. no. 356) and *There's the Old Gent Again* (1938-39, cat. no. 354), to the suggestive but empty interiors of *Habitation* (1938-39, cat. no. 343) and *Night Prowler* (1941, cat. no. 413), to the various portraits of Uncle Ben that appear in *Uncle Ben Again* (1945, cat. no. 451), *Strange Vigil* (1946, cat. no. 463), *The Watcher* (1947, cat. no. 464), and others. Curiously, no two of these portraits are alike, with different degrees of attention either to the viewer or the space beyond the open door. In other works, Cone added another figure, perhaps an unnamed aunt. In December 1947, Cone submitted an entry for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts annual exhibition and mused about the titles he would assign works in this series. His draft titles included: *Perplexed Watcher*, *Ancestor Watching*, *Attentive Ancestor*, *Ancestral Orator*, *Ancestor*, *Prolonged Vigil*, *The Call*, *Ancestral Monitor*, *Custodian*, *The Long Wait*, *Apprehensive Ancestor*, *Interrupted Watch*, *On Guard*, *Still There*, *Probably a Relative*, *Solemn Moment*, *Strange to Me Now Are the Forms I Meet*, *The Custodian* (1948, cat. no. 487) was rejected from the 1948 Pennsylvania Academy exhibition.
5. Allen Nelson, "Cone's Art Still Fills His Home," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 20 November 1966, sec. A, p. 12.
6. Cone returned to the theme of the circus and carnival during the late 1930s. He did not concentrate on this spectacle as John Steuart Curry (1897-1946) had done, but he is closer to Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958), one of his favorite artists. Cone appreciated du Bois's sense of humor, piercing power of character observation, arresting quality of craftsmanship, and power of simplification. He also liked du Bois's kindly and amused attitude toward life, a quality readily seen in Cone's *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1934-35, cat. no. 304), *Waiting for the Parade* (1934-35, cat. no. 305), *The Side Show* (1935, cat. no. 307), *Carnival Graces* (1943, cat. no. 437), and *Tramp Comedian* (1945, cat. no. 450), among others. Curiously, Cone did only a small number of circus paintings, but they do demonstrate the sense of humor for which he was recognized even in his youth.
7. Emma Grattan (d. 1944) was for many years superintendent of art in the Cedar Rapids schools. She left Cedar Rapids in 1926—when Grant Wood stopped teaching—as part of a dramatic cutback in the time allocated to teaching art.
8. See the Appendix for a list of Cone's decorative illustrations from 1907 to 1922.
9. Other contemporary talent shown there included Douglas Volk, Charles Woodbury, Edward Potthast, William Glackens, George Gardner Symons, Daniel Garber, Ernest Lawson, Charles Curran, and Charles E. Eaton.
10. Art appreciation (art history) was not offered at Coe until 1913-14, when the catalog (issued in March 1914) shows a course in the recently established Home Economics Department.
11. See the Appendix for illustrated work done for the *Cosmos*.
12. Cone also spent time with J. H. Hoftrup (1894-1959) and Armand Wargny (1873-1947), who had held highly successful exhibitions in Cedar Rapids during July and August. The two artists spent the summer painting in and around Cedar Rapids, and their exhibit was hailed as the first to reflect local material. Another exhibit of their work was held in March 1914.
13. 1913 Ledger, p. 9, Marvin D. Cone Archives, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. All ledgers cited are held in the Marvin D. Cone Archives.
14. 1913 Ledger, p. 12.
15. Cone entered the School of the Art Institute in November 1914 and left in May 1917. His teachers were: 1914-15—Robert Oliver (b. 1882), Louis W. Wilson (1872-1919), and Elmer A. Forsberg (1883-1950); 1915-16—Antonin Sterba (1875-1963) and Karl A. Buehr (1866-1952); 1916-17—Karl A. Buehr and John W. Norton (1876-1934). Their backgrounds were diverse; several of them had trained at the Art Institute and specialized in portraits, murals, and graphics. Curiously, John Steuart Curry entered the Art Institute School in October 1916 and remained until March 1918. Grant Wood also attended the Art Institute School during the following periods: 20 October 1913-19 June 1914 (evening); 12 October 1914-19 January 1915 (evening); 3-14 January 1914 (day). Additional material about the Art Institute can be found in Esther Sparks, *A Biographical Dictionary of Painters and Sculptors in Illinois 1808-1945* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1971), 71-30.954.
16. William H. Gerdtts, "Post-Impressionist Landscape Painting in America," *Art and Antiques*, July-August 1983, p. 63.
17. Cone was heavily influenced by James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903). He avidly collected his many writings, especially those dealing with the painter's role as a decorator.
18. 1913 Ledger, pp. 39, 40, 53.
19. 1913 Ledger, p. 26, dated 14 September 1914.
20. This and several other works were included in the annual exhibition of the Art Students League of Chicago. Cone's acquaintance C. F. Browne was on the 1916-17 jury. Invariably Cone used Newcomb-Macklin frames for works that he was especially pleased with. Newcomb-Macklin was in existence from approximately 1872 to 1981.
21. *The Continent* continued *The Interior* (established 1870) and *The Westminster* (established 1904) and was published weekly by the McCormick Publishing Company. See the Appendix for a complete record of Cone's illustrations.
22. Cone also was a contributor to *The Art Student* of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In January 1916 (vol. 1, no. 3) he illustrated an article by Denry, "Abroad at Home" (pp. 96-97). In December 1916 (vol. 2, no. 1) he wrote "The Ghetto," illustrated by Arthur W. Hall (pp. 30-32) and was listed as a staff worker.
23. For information about Hall, see Barbara Thompson O'Neill and George C. Foreman, *The Prairie Print Makers* (Topeka, Kans.: Arts Commission, 1981). Anthony Angarola (1893-1929) was also a close friend of Cone's. Angarola similarly shared Cone's preference for flattened pictorial and spatial effects. For more information about this excellent painter see the exhibition catalogue *Anthony Angarola-An American Modernist* (New York: ACA Galleries, 1988).
24. 1916 Ledger, pp. 10-11.

25. Jesse W. Fewkes, *1914 Archaeology of the Lower Mimbres Valley, New Mexico* (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection, vol. 63, no. 10); *1915 Prehistoric Remains in New Mexico: Exploration and Field Work of the Smithsonian Institution in 1914* (Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection, vol. 65, no. 6, pp. 2-72).
26. The insignia remained in use from 1918 to 1945 and was the subject of an article, "34th Division Insignia," in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 11 February 1942. According to Eldon D. Johnson, secretary of the 34th Infantry Division Association in Cedar Rapids, the inspiration for Cone's design was the numerous steer skulls found in the desert around Camp Cody. A history of the insignia is included in the division records. Cone's painting of the insignia is in the collection of the Memorial Coliseum Commission.
27. 1918-19 Ledger, p. 3.
28. 1918-19 Ledger, p. 30.
29. 1918-19 Ledger, pp. 1-2.
30. "Cone Writes Vivid Description of an Ancient French Village Where Life Is Happy and Gay," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 3 June 1919, p. 2. (Cone's description is contained in a letter to his father.) For more information, see: Elizabeth H. Turner, *American Artists in Paris, 1919-1929* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).
31. Karen Tsujimoto, *Images of America* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1982), p. 14.
32. 1918-19 Ledger, p. 42. On several occasions during the early 1920s, Cone read excerpts from these ledgers. One reading was covered in the 3 November 1922 issue of the *Coe College Cosmos*.
33. From 1887 to 1912, Coe College had offered some instruction in art, but it was sporadic. A history of art (art appreciation) course taught by a Professor Bensen was introduced in 1914. In 1899 and 1902 Miss Alice Louise Burton briefly offered a drawing class. She was a student of Charles A. Cumming (1858-1932) at Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa and an acquaintance of Chicago printmaker Bertha E. Jaques (1863-1941).
34. "Attractive Exhibition of Paintings by Marvin Cone and Grant Wood," *Cedar Rapids Sunday Republican*, 12 October 1919, p. 7.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

## Chapter 2

1. For example, Cone records that on July 13 and 16 he completed two paintings of reflections at Ville d'Avray and on July 17 and 18, July 20 and 22, July 24 and 25, and July 29 he painted in the Luxembourg Gardens; between July 21 and 22 Grant completed a bas-relief portrait of Cone; on August 2 Cone painted a scene on rue Sufflot looking toward the Pantheon. On other occasions he documented paintings of poplars, still lifes, scenes in Montmartre, and finally a sketch for a mural decoration.
2. 1920 Ledger, 30 June, n.p.
3. 1920 Ledger, 12 July, n.p.
4. An interesting letter (29 November 1906) from Edward Hopper to his sister describes the appeal that Paris held for him and for many other American artists:  

Paris, as you must know, is a very paintable city, particularly on and around the Isle de Cite [sic] which was the first Paris. Here the streets are very old and narrow and many of the houses slope back from the top of the first story which gives them a most imposing and solid appearance. The wine shops and stores beneath are darkened or green contrasting strongly with the plaster or stone above. On the roofs hundreds of pipes and chimney pots stick up into the air giving the sky a most peculiar appearance. The roofs are all mansard type and either of slate or zinc. On a day that's overcast this same blue-grey permeates everything.

Quoted in Gail Leven, *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), p. 23.
5. Gladys Arne, "Local Artists Encountered All Kinds of Difficulties Painting in France; Work Is Complimented," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 20 November 1920, p. 3.

6. A similar situation existed for Edward Hopper, who in 1920 held an exhibition at the Whitney Studio Club of sixteen paintings, eleven of which were Paris subjects.
7. Grant Wood and Marvin Cone devised the game "Mr. Raffles" to help people get acquainted on board ship. Passengers approached each other with the ship's morning bulletin and asked, "Are you Mr. Raffles?" One morning Winnifred's sister approached Grant, who was Mr. Raffles, and that is how Winnifred and Marvin became acquainted. A student at the University of Toronto, Miss Swift (b. 15 April 1899) was the daughter of Edward Dimond Swift (1861-1934) and Elizabeth Dodds Swift (1868-1964).
8. Cone's father remarried on the same day in Chicago to Mary E. Consigny (b. 4 March 1862), who was a close friend of Marvin's mother. Unfortunately, they soon moved to Seattle, Washington, after sustaining a severe financial setback. Harry D. Cone died after a long illness on 24 September 1931. Mary E. Cone died on 31 January 1940 in Cedar Rapids, where she had moved in 1937.
9. Robert Cron, "Marvin Cone—A True Artist," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 30 January 1927, sec. 2, p. 2.
10. Although these exhibitions have been verified in Cone's records, many details, such as the precise dates and works exhibited, are unknown.
11. The works collected include: *Winding Stream*, by George G. Symons, and *The Captain, the Cook and the First Mate*, by Charles W. Hawthorne.
12. In one of these reviews Cone commented extensively on a painting composition:  

One of the fundamental requisites of a good painting is good composition; the various elements that go to make up the picture must be arranged or put together in a pleasing relationship. An artist may paint nature just as he sees it and still "arrange" or "compose" his picture. He may be as faithful as a camera to the scene before him and still have everything to say about how the separate elements shall be related to one another. The painter has to compose whether he will or not. It is a matter of compulsion. He commences to compose the minute he determines the proportions of his canvas; he is composing when he chooses a hilly landscape in preference to the flat prairie or vice versa; again when he chooses to look down on the hills from some eminence rather than up toward them from a valley; and still again when he determines what proportion of the canvas the hills are to occupy in relation to the sky—and so on. There are always choices to be made. Art is choice—and an artist is as good as his choices are good.
13. George Keeler, "Exhibit of Works by City Artists in Public Library Is Extended by Big Demand," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 29 April 1922, p. 16.
14. "Murals, Landscapes, Decorative Art Are Part of Exhibition," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5 May 1923, p. 14.
15. "Local Artists' Works Are Enjoyed by Many Visitors at Library," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 8 May 1923, p. 15. These comments are reminiscent of John Constable's remarks in 1821:  

I have done a great deal of skying, for I am determined to conquer all difficulties, and that among the rest. That landscape painter who does not make his sky a very material part of his composition, neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. . . . It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the keynote, the standard of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment. . . . The sky is the source of light in Nature and it governs everything; even the common observations on the weather of every day are altogether suggested by it.

Quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 79.
16. "Many Admire Marvin Cone's Paintings on Exhibit at Coe," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette and Republican*, 20 November 1928, p. 14.
17. Cone organized numerous lectures and exhibitions at the art association, viewing them as critical exposure for his art students at Coe and for the general public. On 30 April 1923, Dudley Crafts Watson (1885-1972), then director of the Milwaukee Art Institute, lectured on "The American Woman's Place in Art." Lorado Taft was also a frequent visitor.

18. Perhaps a contributing factor to this increased interest was the controversy in the public schools concerning the teaching of art. Amid considerable discussion, the school board decided to dramatically cut back the number of teaching hours allocated to art. As a result of this controversy, Grant Wood ceased his association with the school district. For further information, see the following: "College Art Courses Draw Many Students," *Coe College Cosmos*, 22 October 1925, p. 4; "Study of Art in Public School Here Causes Hot Discussion by the Public," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 12 August 1925, p. 1; "Art in the Public Schools of Cedar Rapids," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 16 August 1925, p. 1; "Too Much Art, Is Belief of Board Member," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, 18 August 1925, p. 12; "Board Cuts Study of Art Here," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 11 August 1925, p. 1; "City Is Divided on Time Given to School Art," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 13 August 1925, p. 1; "School Art Still Burning Question," *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 15 August 1925, p. 7.
19. Cone was enrolled at the University of Iowa during the following semesters: 1924-25, 1925-26, 1926-27, summer 1927, and 1927-28. Apparently due to an administrative change, Coe College in 1928 no longer insisted that Cone receive an M.A. to continue teaching French.
20. Rowan arranged for numerous exhibitions from New York galleries such as Macbeth and Kennedy. The emphasis was on contemporary talent, featuring the best in painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts.
21. American Federation of Arts, *Program for the Twenty-first Annual Convention*, Washington, D.C., Mayflower Hotel, 14-16 May 1930.
22. For additional information on Paul Manship and Hermon MacNeil, see Wayne Craven, *Sculpture in America* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1984), pp. 565-68 and pp. 516-21. Johnson is represented in the Art Institute of Chicago collection with *The Black Mantilla*, 1928.
23. "Marvin Cone Describes Life in Paris as Artist Sees It," *Cedar Rapids Sunday Gazette and Republican*, 18 August 1929, p. 3.
24. Constance Rourke, *Charles Sheeler: An Artist in the American Tradition*, p. 130. Quoted in Karen Tsujimoto, *Images of America*, p. 85.
25. Edward B. Rowan and David McCosh, "Art Exhibit of Marvin Cone," *Coe College Courier*, December 1929, p. 4.
26. "Art News of the Little Gallery," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 6 December 1929, p. 27.
27. Martin Friedman et al., *Charles Sheeler* (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, 1968), pp. 56, 57.

### Chapter 3

1. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 295, pp. 284-86.
2. Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 90.
3. Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 26, footnote 56: "These authors, active in the late 1910s and 1920s, were following in the footsteps of Hamlin Garland and mining the Midwest for literary subjects."
4. Approximately 28 million people visited this reaffirmation of national unity and progress, in spite of the mounting social and industrial turmoil in the country. For more information, see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
5. William H. Gerdts, *American Impressionism* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984), pp. 145-49.
6. Joshua Taylor, *America as Art* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), p. 238.
7. This is especially evident in Wood's lectures. For example, see the reviews in the following: *Waterloo Courier*, 12 April 1931; *Kansas City Star*, 20 March 1931; *Pittsburgh Press*, 25 April 1932; *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald and Times-Journal*, 11 March 1932; *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 January 1936. Copies are preserved in the Turner Archives, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, and the Wood Scrapbooks, Davenport Museum of Art.
8. John I. H. Baur, ed., *New Art in America: Fifty Painters of the 20th Century* (New York and Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, in cooperation with Praeger Publishers, 1957), p. 22.

9. Matthew Baigell, *The American Scene: American Painting of the 1930s* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), pp. 46-54. The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was established in December 1933 and terminated in June 1934, succeeded by the Section of Painting and Sculpture in the Treasury Department, which lasted until 1943. The Federal Art Project at WPA was established in May 1935 and lasted until 1943.
10. Lloyd Goodrich and John I. H. Baur, *American Art of Our Century* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and Praeger Publishers, 1961), p. 49.
11. David Burnett, *Colville* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario and McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1983), p. 200.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
13. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America* (1831; Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1971), p. 398.
14. In addition to these activities, Cone in 1936 prepared a series of backdrops for exhibitions at Coe College's Science Museum. For more information, see Kathryn O'Bryon, "Glassy Haunts of Science Museum Enclose Unusual Bird Specimens," *Coe College Cosmos*, 12 March 1936, p. 1.
15. The "Group of Seven" included A. Y. Jackson (1882-1974), Lawren S. Harris (1885-1970), James E. H. MacDonald (1873-1932), Arthur Lismer (1885-1969), Frederick H. Varley (1881-1969), Franklin Carmichael (1890-1945), and Franz Johnston (1888-1948).
16. A number of these sketches are known, including: *Stone City*, c. 1930; *Fall Plowing*, 1931; *Preliminary Sketch—Young Corn*, c. 1931 No. 1/No. 2; *Farm Landscape*, 1931; *Spring Landscape*, c. 1931-32; *Iowa Landscape (Lake McBride)*, c. 1932; *Industrial Landscape*, c. 1931; *Stone City—Landscape Sketch*, c. 1930s; and *Iowa Landscape*, c. 1932. A complete list of the works can be found in Joseph S. Czestochowski, *Marvin Cone and Grant Wood: An American Tradition* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, 1989).
17. Grant Wood, "Aim of the Colony," Brochure for Stone City Colony and Art School, Summer 1932.
18. Grant Wood, "Aim of the Colony," Brochure for Stone City Colony and Art School, Summer 1933.
19. Paul Engle (b. 1908) is a well-known writer who was a close friend of Winnifred and Marvin Cone. He was the director of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa from 1942 to 1965 and founder of the International Writing Program at the university.
20. "Mr. Cone Believes Art Is Inspired by Surroundings," *Coe College Cosmos*, 16 April 1931, p. 2.
21. Manuscript dated 1930.
22. "Prof. Marvin Cone Believes that Paintings Are Experience Records," *Coe College Cosmos*, 30 April 1936, p. 3.
23. Manuscript dated 5 June 1937.
24. Cone did most of his sketches in Shaver Park and Van Vechten Park, located to the north and south of downtown Cedar Rapids, respectively.
25. For some time, *River Farm* (1938-39, cat. no. 365) has been incorrectly dated 1925 due to its purchase for Coe College by the class of 1925. Stylistically, the work is related to *Hill Farms* (1936, cat. no. 332) and dates after this time. Further, an extensive search of Coe's alumni records reveals a 1940 entry simply described as "balance of Cone painting."
26. Quoted in "Prof. Marvin Cone Believes That Paintings Are Experience Records," *Coe College Cosmos*, 30 April 1936, p. 3.
27. Adeline Taylor, "Marvin Cone Landscape 'River Bend,'" *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 17 November 1935, p. 6.
28. George Shane, "Moderns Win Iowa Salon in an Art Upset," *Des Moines Register*, 21 August 1935.
29. "Art News of the Little Gallery," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 31 March 1935.
30. Cone completed three paintings of *Merry-Go-Round* scenes (1934, cat. nos. 299, 300, and 301). Others include *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1934-35, cat. no. 304), *Church Supper* (1934-35, cat. no. 306), *The Side Show* (1935, cat. no. 307), *Freaks* (1935, cat. no. 310), *Snake Charmer* (1935, cat. no. 311), *Educational Exhibit* (1936, cat. no. 320), and several carnival sideshow scenes. The reductive large figure style of these works was

inspired from a variety of sources including Grant Wood. Paul Sample executed a number of inspired works that share this quality with Cone. For more information see Robert L. McGrath, *Paul Sample-Painting the American Scene*, (Hanover, New Hampshire: Hood Museum of Art-Dartmouth College and University Press of New England, 1988).

## Chapter 4

1. Letter to Marvin Cone from David Turner and W. R. Boyd, 4 June 1938, Marvin D. Cone Archives, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art. The individual contributors to this sabbatical included: Miss Jessie Averill, \$100; Dr. and Mrs. David Beardsley, \$120; Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Bever, \$120; Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Brown, \$300; Mr. and Mrs. E. B. Cameron, \$120; Miss Nell Cherry, \$180; Mr. and Mrs. Howard Cherry, \$300; Mr. and Mrs. Robert S. Cook, \$120; Mrs. Walter Douglas, \$100; Mr. and Mrs. Howard Hall, \$100; Mr. and Mrs. Stewart Holmes, \$120; Mr. and Mrs. James E. Hamilton, \$50; Mr. and Mrs. E. A. Johnson, \$100; Killian Company, \$120; Mr. and Mrs. Claire Marshall, \$100; Mr. and Mrs. Sumner D. Quarton, \$100; Mrs. E. P. Risted, \$120; Mr. and Mrs. John C. Reid, \$100; Mr. and Mrs. Van Vechten Shaffer, \$150; Mr. and Mrs. Herbert S. Stamats, \$300; Mr. and Mrs. David Turner, \$120; Miss Eleanor Taylor, \$5; Mr. and Mrs. Weaver Witwer, \$100; Mr. and Mrs. S. W. Wilder, \$120; Mr. Robert Armstrong, \$20; W. C. Crawford, \$120; H. R. Greene, \$60; George Laird, \$150; Charlotte Pinney, \$75; Arthur Poe, \$120.

2. *Coe College Courier*, November 1939, p. 9; Carl Dueser, "Begin Exhibit of Marvin Cone's Paintings," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 15 October 1939, p. 6; Wanda Montz, "Ghosts and Marvin Cone Share Downtown Desert Island Studio," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 26 February 1939, sec. 2, p. 6; Harriett Swain, "Auction of Marvin Cone's Paintings," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 2 November 1939, p. 21.

3. *Farm Life* (1938-39, cat. no. 367) is unique among Cone's works. Although the paintings may appear to be allegorical or iconographical, this was not Cone's intent. Further, in spite of the evident detail, Cone maintained a striking sense of the accidental, deliberately capturing his participants in an unguarded moment.

4. Friedman et al., *Charles Sheeler*, p. 37.

5. Manuscript dated 1946.

6. Quoted in *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 19 January 1938, p. 15, and 26 May 1938, p. 8.

7. Manuscript dated 19 October 1947.

8. Manuscript dated 13 April 1947.

9. Howard E. Wooden, *The Neglected Generation of American Realist Painters 1930-1948* (Wichita, Kans.: Wichita Art Museum, 1981), p. 13.

10. Marvin D. Cone, "Fine Arts Are Best Analysis of Man," *Coe College Cosmos*, 1 November 1944, p. 1.

11. Kynaston McShine et al., *The Natural Paradise: Painting in America 1800-1950* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), p. 37.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

## Chapter 5

1. John W. McCoubrey, *American Art 1700-1960, Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 96.

2. Quoted in Kynaston McShine et al., *The Natural Paradise*, p. 108.

3. Edgar P. Richardson, *A Short History of Painting in America* (New York: Crowell, 1956), p. 313.

4. About this subject Cone commented, "I'd still paint good old Iowa barns if I could find one, but it seems like the farmers are all painting them white. In fact, the only barn I know of that's still standing since I painted it is somewhere around Toddville. . .and I haven't seen it for a number of years." Quoted in Larry Stern, "Marvin Cone: A Career of Guidance," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 29 May 1960, sec. 3, p. 6.

5. John I. H. Baur, *The Inlander: Life and Work of Charles Burchfield, 1893-1967* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1982), p. 260.

6. Donald Key, "Exemplary Cone Show Opening Today in C.R.," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 17 November 1957, sec. 1, p. 14.

7. Arshile Gorky, 17 February 1947. Quoted in Kynaston McShine et al., *The Natural Paradise*, pp. 125-27.

8. Charles Sheeler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (microfilm roll NSH-1, frame 8).

9. *Ibid.*, frame 58.

10. Cone's appointment was for three years and carried a stipend of \$10,000 contributed by his friends.

11. Manuscript dated 14 November 1963.

12. Manuscript dated 1947.

13. Paul Engle, "Portrait of the Artist as Neighbor," *Marvin Cone: A Retrospective Exhibition 1938-1960* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Department of Art, 1960), n.p.