
Artists In Exile

The 1900s brought serious upheaval to European communities. With two World Wars, there was a huge immigration wave to the United States, among them thousands of artists looking for a new place to call home. This “intellectual migration” brought in new perspectives in large numbers into the blossoming American artistic community, shaping new minds for generations. “Artists in Exile” is a complicated book that explores the multifaceted effect of immigration on the American art community. This wave of classically trained painters, choreographers and musicians, along with younger artistic minds ready to be molded bring with them a wealth of knowledge from the old world. This novel takes several case studies to analyze how this immigration, not only changed the American art community, but also the artists themselves. In the following paper, I explore several distinct artists who experience unique but parallel stories about their entrance into the new world.

A great example of one artists whose foreign influences can be seen to this day is George Balanchine. Born in Russia, he spent most of his youth training in the Soviet Union in ballet, until he defected to Paris with a few other members of the Soviet State Dancers. In Paris, he began making a name for himself as a dancer and a choreographer, creating nine ballets, working with such names as Picasso and Stravinsky. His most famous piece, the Apollo, combines an ancient greek myth with jazz and is most notable for its unique minimalism in sets and costumes which emphasizes the dancers movements. By the time George Balanchine immigrated to American he was already a seasoned ballet instructor with an established name in the arts community. Upon his moving to Manhattan, George Balanchine took to America immediately, it was large, new and unfinished, and that appealed to him. Without hundred of years of established artistic communities he was able to start anew, taking heavily to a traditional American lifestyle. Within a few months he founded a ballet school which hosted young dancers from all over New York and the United States and not long after they performed their first recital, Serenade. This performance held clear influences of George Balanchine’s unique Russian, European and American background along with his unique minimalistic style that was apparent in the Apollo. He again focused on very simple lighting, scenery and costumes in order to emphasize the dancers movements. He also added a nontraditional vigorous Russian dance in the third movement of this pieces, heavily drawing on his training in the Soviet Union. He also wasn’t afraid to adapt what he had learned in America; in traditional Russian ballet it important for the dancers to “feel what [George Balanchine] is expressing,” however with these new, mostly untested performers, he was able to create a new style, bypassing their flaws and focusing on the “sweetness and bond between all these young dancers.” This unique look had never been done before and was the beginning of a long period of influence that Balanchine held over the American dance community. Balanchine even went on to choreograph some Broadway shows along with several dances in Hollywood movies, continuing to draw upon his distinct European training. Balanchine’s distinct minimalistic and neoclassical style along with his European musical experience left a distinct mark whose influences can still be felt today. The School of American Ballet, which is associated with the New York City of Ballet is still active to this day.

On the other hand, there were also many artists who were equally shaped by the American artistic scene. One of the best examples of this is Edgard Varèse. With a turbulent childhood,

bouncing around major European states he had a complicated, blurred cultural identity from a young age. Varèse was born in Paris, but was described “as and as not French” and even though his father was Italian he never felt deeply connected with that community either. Instead he turned to his mother’s Germanic heritage as a cultural guide. Varèse first music lesson was in Italy, where he composed his first Opera; however, his father strongly disapproved of music as a career and demanded that he switch to engineer, straining their relationship until he left home to study music. Varèse went on to study composition in Paris and Berlin he decided to move to the United States. Unlike George Balanchine, Edgard Varèse moved to America very early in his career, still with a lot to learn, and upon his arrival he met with varying reviews of his works as a conductor. The key to his eventual success was his connection to Mrs. Whitney, a sculptress whose studio was a meeting point for artists and who provided Varèse with an allowance. This connection allowed him to exchange ideas with other migrant artists and eventually found the International Composers Guild (ICG), which dedicated itself to new composers in both America and Europe. In his mind, America was the pinnacle of music expression, as a clean slate it was the perfect place to experiment with artistic freedom and this guild allowed Varèse to share his ideas with others. These very ideas went on to father a new wave of “ultra-modern” thinkers who hailed Varèse as a father figure to their movement. Varèse went on to experiment with electronic based music, with his first major experimental piece Hyperprism, whose percussion section included a siren. Varèse went on to mentor other young artists, such as Chou and continue to develop this new type of American music, believing that “American music must speak its own language and not be the result of a certain mummified European formula.” His legacy in the American Music scene however will be his experimentation with electronic music, as he is now considered the father of Electronic Music, whose freestyle he developed thanks to the collaboration with other artists in this community.

Some artists might even go beyond their roles in the art community. Marlene Dietrich got her start as a German studio player where Sternberg discovered her and was immediately convinced she was the actress he was looking for and undertook a screen test to prove it and went on to produce several silent films in Germany. From there she continued to gain popularity, especially after she was cast as Lola in *The Blue Angel*: due to her ability to speak both German and English fluently. This movie brought her international fame and an eventual contract with Paramount Pictures, which allowed her to move into the major Hollywood Scene. From there her next six films were filmed with Sternberg in Hollywood and included such films as *Morocco*, *Shanghai* and *Express*, where she was successfully able to morph her original cabaret, glamorous aesthetic to a new exotic character, able to take on more daring roles and rising to new heights. Her most daring stunt was during a scene from *Morocco* where she dressed as a man for a cabaret number and kissed a woman, something that was wildly provocative for the times. Over time she became the most popular cultural export to the United States, devoting her time now to Hollywood and all it had to offer. It wasn’t until World War II did she begin becoming a new controversial character. Dietrich, being both German and American was at the center point for the political battles that were to come. She vehemently rejected the Nazi party and insisted that her family move out of the country as they took power. She became a sign of a “good German” as she Americanized more and more, perplexing her German fans. During World War II she was approached by representatives of the Nazi party and vehemently turned them down, going as far as to renounce her German Citizenship, performing for Allied troops and helping Jews escape from Germany. She used her influence as a movie star off the stage to shape what Americans think of what it means to be German. She went on to star in dozens of more roles in America and eventually went on to perform on Broadway twice. Although she ended up returning to Germany later in her life she really became an American icon and was

absorbed into the American arts scene as an American star.

These artists, along with the countless of other migrant intellectuals that came to America in the 1900s, created the foundation for a huge portion of the modern work we hold dear. From the founding of prominent schools of ballet to developing networks for the international exchange of ideas, the 1900s truly was a great time of artistic diversity that continues to fuel modern masterpieces. "Artists in Exile" does a masterful job in exploring how these artists roles interleave and play out through their lifetime and concludes with the important note that a lot of the modern fluidity of exchange and diversity in the artistic community is thanks to the artists of this decade who had to break into the American communities in a time that had so much upheaval. They raised the bar for what we consider to be great art. The effects the intellectual migration goes far beyond the evolution of the artistic community, intellectuals from countless fields also came to the New World this time period, readily absorbing especially scientific minds. These scientists had a different acceptance into American society, with the common language of science it was much easier to blend into these communities and fewer barriers arise when there isn't public opinion at play. In modern times we are seeing another wave of similar exchange of ideas, this time coming from the East. With today's largest wave of immigration coming from Asia we are seeing another exchange of ideas. A great example is Zhou Long's The Ineffable which combines traditional asian folk movement and western techniques of schooling and ensemble. This is especially apparent with the rise of asian instruments in American music and western instruments in chinese popular music. Although we are really just beginning this new intellectual exchange, hopefully this will continue to take the arts and science to a new height.