

Paul Cadmus: *The Male Nude*



Male Nude NM16, 1965. Crayon on hand-toned paper, 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

February 8 – March 16, 2024

Opening Reception, February 8, 6 – 8 pm

DC Moore Gallery is pleased to present ***Paul Cadmus: The Male Nude***, opening February 8th and continuing through March 16th, 2024. This is the first major solo exhibition of this important 20th century artist in over 20 years, and one of the only ones to highlight Cadmus's highly finished male nude drawings. Nine rarely exhibited paintings will be on view in this exhibition, placing these intimate drawings in context and opening a conversation between these two sides of Cadmus's practice. This will be a unique opportunity to see major works by this 20th-century master.

The iconic 1933 painting *Y.M.C.A. Locker Room*, not seen publicly in many decades, will be on view in this exhibition. A formal Renaissance composition is juxtaposed with the mundane but homoerotic setting of a changing room, with statuesque, half-dressed male figures animated through the meetings of limbs and gazes. *The Shower* (1943), a sultry Fire Island painting, explores the dynamic between Paul Cadmus and his long-time lover, painter Jared French, and Jared's new wife— and Cadmus's friend— Margaret French. The painting *Manikins* (1951) shows two artist's figurines resting on William Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and a copy of André Gide's early 20th century book *Corydon*, which argues that homosexuality is not unnatural and was fundamental to civilizations throughout history. *The Nap* (1952), a languid painting of a solitary nude figure, suggests loneliness and longing.

SHAME! (1992) is perhaps a fitting painting to show within this exhibition of male nudes, as it was inspired by Cadmus' indignation at reading an outraged letter to the editor about a magazine's reproduction of Masaccio's recently restored *Expulsion of Adam and Eve*. The scandalized reader called this reproduction pornography because of the depiction of nudity. Cadmus wrote, "Perhaps

SHAME! Should be dedicated to the writer of that letter for giving us such a profound definition of the word PORNOGRAPHY: a naked man and woman.”



Y.M.C.A. Locker Room, 1933. Oil on canvas, 19 3/8 x 39 1/4 inches. Private Collection.

Paul Cadmus (1904-1999) was born in New York to artist parents in 1904. A precocious artist, he won many awards and scholarships in his early years while studying at the National Academy of Design. In 1931, he left New York to travel Europe with the painter, and his lover, Jared French. They bicycled throughout Europe, seeking out churches and museums to see the art they admired firsthand. During this time, and an extended stay in Mallorca, Cadmus created drawings and some of his first satirical paintings, *Y.M.C.A. Locker Room* and *Shore Leave*. When Cadmus returned to New York in 1933, he enrolled in the New Deal's Public Works of Art Project. His irreverent painting *The Fleet's In!* (1934) depicting debauched sailors on the west side of Manhattan, stirred up a controversy when the painting was ejected from a PWAP exhibition in Washington, DC. The ensuing scandal propelled his career and gave him national notoriety. His paintings from this period were painstakingly conceived with great detail, ambition, and biting wit.

In 1940, he began painting with egg tempera, an early Renaissance medium which instilled a luminousness to his work. These paintings were slow to complete, however. When Cadmus passed away in 1999, he had only created only about 135 paintings over a 75-year career. Over the years, Cadmus's love of drawing was steady. In the earlier years, many of his drawings were studies for paintings, but by the 1940s, he created drawings as finished works of art. On hand-toned paper, Cadmus would use the same fine cross hatching technique of his egg tempera paintings to create volume and form. He used crayon, chalks, colored inks, and even egg tempera to create the sensation of life emanating from the figure. He drew his friends and his lovers from life, celebrating the beauty of the male form and by extension, love between men, through the intimate act of drawing.

In 1965, Cadmus met Jon Anderson, who became his life partner and the subject of his most beautiful drawings. These drawings comprise the NM series— for “Nantucket Man,” affectionately indicating where the two first met. Cadmus continued to draw Anderson for the remaining 34 years of his life.

In the later years of his life, Paul Cadmus became a quiet icon and daring example of integrity to artists and to people who found refuge in his powerful, sensual expressions of male beauty and queer desire. In a 1998 interview Cadmus said to Justin Spring, “I have never thought of [my drawings and paintings] as political acts, ... And I never think of them as aiming to add to public consciousness, but maybe they have. In certain cases— particularly in reproduction in books, I think— they help people who are far from cultural climates like New York... It helps them feel they are not alone.” Cadmus continues to be celebrated as a pioneer, whose taboo-breaking work has inspired generations of artists.

DC Moore Gallery specializes in contemporary and twentieth-century art. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am-6pm. For more information, photographs, or to arrange a viewing please call 212-247-2111 or email Caroline Magavern at cmagavern@dcmooregallery.com.