



# Debating American Modernism: Stieglitz, Duchamp, and the New York Avant-Garde

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When Duchamp moved from Paris to New York in 1915, he was disappointed by the predominantly nature-based abstraction he observed, publicly proclaiming that American artists were too dependent on outmoded European traditions and had overlooked their greatest subjects--the skyscraper and the machine. Meanwhile, the artists associated with Alfred Stieglitz and his "291" gallery remained loyal to their belief in nature as a source of ongoing renewal for visual culture, and emphasized the crucial role that intuition and spirituality played in their creation of art. The crossfire between Duchamp and Stieglitz and their respective circles defined a critical moment in early twentieth-century American art. *Debating Modernism* includes reproductions of work by artists from both camps, from Charles Demuth, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Paul Strand to Man Ray, Francis Picabia, and Marsden Hartley. An essay by curator Debra Bricker Balken traces the threads of the debate through the 1910s and 20s, and also addresses the appearance of sexualized imagery in nearly all of these artists' works, a phenomenon that ironically unifies the two seemingly opposed camps. Jay Bochner's essay focuses on the artists' respective violations of American expectations about art.

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