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AD REINHARDT COLLECTION
gift of
MR. & MRS. WALTER T. WITTMAN
exhibition

November 1991 – July 1992

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Memoir of Ad Reinhardt by Walter Wittman

Checklist

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Mr. & Mrs. Walter T. Wittman's
generous gift of
correspondence and designs
by Ad Reinhardt,
together with publications
concerning his life & work,
are now housed with the
Special Collections
of The Museum of Modern Art Library.

C.P.

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Memoir of Ad Reinhardt by Walter Wittman

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AD REINHARDT - THE FORMATIVE YEARS

In September 1931, the second year of the Great Depression, the paths of two lads of 17 crossed at Columbia College: one path out of the east, by 5-cent subway fare from the working class Queens suburb of Ridgewood, bearing Adolph Dietrich Friedrich Reinhardt (Ad); the other out of the west, by trolley and 125th Street Hudson River ferry, from the Bergen County farm town of Paramus, bearing me, Walter Thurston Wittman (Walt).

The exact point of intersection of these two paths was the class in advanced intermediate German taught by the handsome, militarily erect young Herr Wendt, who delighted in traveling Heinrich Heine's "Harzreise" with us. That's the point at which we two lads first shook hands. Scholastic Achievement Test scores had landed us as two freshman in this advanced intermediate German class. And for good reason. Both our fathers and mothers were immigrants from German-speaking Central Europe, so German was spoken and understood in our homes since Ad and I were infants.

Nor was this inbred Sprachgefühl for the German language the only cultural orientation passed on to us, for both our fathers had been born before Marx and Engels died, and both had early in their youth become aware that a spectre was haunting Europe.

It was not long, then, as life at Columbia began to unfold, that Ad and I found there was a sound stone on which we stood: an ingrained commitment against injustice, privilege and bigotry. It was a commitment that would remain with us for the rest of our days, in the classroom and on the campus, in Academe and on the street.

Our classroom life was soon to prove how close to home we'd find bigotry. We had enrolled in a second German class - writing and current literature. There we encountered Professor Betz, whose admiration of the rise of Hitler was matched by the cruelty of his ill-concealed anti-Semitism toward Jewish students in the class.

How different from the final year of German when Ad and I enrolled in the Schopenhauer and Nietzsche Seminar conducted by the gentle, owlsh Professor Heuser! What an inspiration for Ad's gentle self-spoofing Jester cartoon in 1933.

On the campus our freshman year found us carrying protest signs Ad lettered in the strike against Dean Hawkes' expulsion of Reed Harris (later to become a U.S. State Department spokesman) the student editor of Spectator, our college daily, for writing editorials lamenting the deaths and injuries sustained on inter-collegiate football fields and calling for the abolition of that sport as a college activity.

Ad's rapidly expanding artistic horizons left little time for personal athletic achievement. His brush and pen, however, were ever ready to depict the grace and strength of a wrestler (though he himself had been dropped from a promising wrestling career for breach of training rules).

He had unending pride, too, in the Columbia basketball role of Bill Nash, a fellow graduate of Ad's at Newtown High School in Queens. But Ad's own stardom was symbolized by the Arista pin he had won at Newtown High.

Our correspondence in the summer of 1932 reflects the tenor of our first year's friendship; discussions about everything:

- friends (Frank, Jack, Artie, Ed);
- girls (Lee, Marie, Eleanor, Madeline);
- going steady (marriage economics);
- philosophy (idealism, pessimism, iconoclasm);
- college registration and rooming for 1932-3;
- offer from Jester Editor Byron Rabbitt.

Our 1932-33 sophomore year was a spirited mix of town and gown. The scarcity of money failed to suppress the joyous drive of youth. It was love on the dole, a Brechtian scene that supplied Ad with an unending source of material for little spots and cartoons of tea dances, jitterbugging and boozing. Both Ad and I had meal jobs: mine was washing aluminum trays at Teachers College Cafeteria and Ad's job at the cafeteria was dashing off Miss Read's specials of the day in that rapid, beautiful hand lettering of his.

That too was the year that I fell in love with the Barnard girl, Jeannette - who to this day recalls, "Ad was the only man I let call me Jenny".

But equally memorable were the high spots in the intellectual turmoil of that year, exciting new currents and eddies. There was the classroom bombshell named Professor William Casey, anthropological sociologist with Frazer's "Golden Bough" in one hand and iconoclastic religious ham bones in the other. In contrast was the brilliant insight of the literary epicurean, Professor Raymond Weaver, whose penetrating perception of Ad's artistic talents led Ad to the incomparable art teacher, Meyer Shapiro.

The intensity of Ad's activities in art and literature grew apace in our junior and senior years. As the Depression deepened, the student body divided into a right wing and a left wing. Ad campaigned for and won a seat on the Board of Student Representatives on a platform of abolishing student fraternities. His exceptional artistic performance during his first three years on Jester won him the post of Editor-in-Chief for his fourth year.

When University President Nicholas Murray Butler publicly denounced a bill for child labor law reform, Ad's 1934 cartoon lampooning Butler, prepared for Jester, was suppressed by the Administration (though it later found its way to the front page of Spectator).

Shortly thereafter, in 1935, King's Crown Student Advisory Board cravenly supported the Administration move for prior censorship of Spectator. Only Ad and Dave Cook voted against the action.

Associated with Ad and frequent contributors to Jester was as fine a group of undergraduate writers, poets and critics as Columbia had ever produced: Leonard Robinson, John Treville La Touche, Robert Lax, Robert Gibney, John Slate and Si Freedgood.

The acquisition of our B.A. degrees in 1935 set us off on diverging paths, neither of which, however, witnessed a departure from the commitments bequeathed to us by our fathers.

Jeannette and I took a 5-cent subway ride to City Hall in 1935 to get married and I commenced my law studies at Kent (the old building), taking my LL.B. in February, 1938.

Ad stayed in post-graduate work for a year and then went on the W.P.A. Federal Art Project as "Artist, Class 1, Grade 4, \$87.60 mo., Easel Division", where he stayed until he was fired in 1941.

Throughout the uneasy 1935-42 period, Ad defied the chilling cold war winds.

At the height of the Hitler-Mussolini air war in support of Francisco Franco's fascist attack on the democratically elected Spanish Republic, Ad's drawings appeared in praise of the International Brigade.

Under the pseudonym of Darryl Frederick, his unmistakable style appeared on the cover of Soviet Russia Today, our soon-to-be-ally.

And, in all modesty, he produced for me his first all-black: a sturdy black wooden panel, tooth-cut at both sides, with the legend in gilt: - "Walter Wittman, Attorney-at-Law." My first shingle! There it was, on the front door of the 3-room attic apartment Jeannette and I took in 1938 at S-19 Spring Valley Road, Paramus, New Jersey. I wish I still had it!

During this period, Ad had joined the Artists' Union and also the American Abstract Artists. Times were tough. He and his first wife, Pat (whose son Jed became the apple of his eye) lived in a dark Hell's Kitchen apartment at Gansevoort Street.

Those were the times we'd delight in viewing the Ariel mural Ad had painted in Barney Josephson's downtown Cafe Society.

Ad eked out a living as best he could. For the newspaper PM he produced a series of cartoons in which he marinated his profound knowledge of art history in the searing sauce of satire.

PM's other cartoonist Crockett Johnson, creator of the beloved Barnaby strip, was among the social guests at Ad's and Pat's. We still giggle at the memory of one of Ad's metal chairs surrendering with a crash under the weight of Crockett's mighty frame.

Another friend we met there was the distinguished architect (and later art preservationist) James Marston Fitch and his wife Cleo. Jim, a leading faculty member of Columbia's School of Architecture, and author of "American Building", lent his skill (in his pure Tennessee accent) to the construction and placement of the house we were about to build at Century Road in Paramus.

It was for the house-warming party at that home on June 6, 1942 (conducted as a U.S.O. - Russian-China War Relief event) that Ad devised the ingenious invitation that in and of itself accounted for the S.R.O. attendance.

In 1944, Ad found himself in Navy boot camp, from which he continued to delight PM readers with his cartoons of Navy life. Designated as an aerial photographer, he was honorably discharged in 1945 when the war ended.

Ad's job at PM came to an end in 1946, and in 1947, he became a teacher of art and art history at Brooklyn College. His first visit abroad in 1953, was to Greece, where he delighted in taking (and showing) hundreds of color slides.

A year later, his second wife, Rita, gave birth to their daughter, Anna.

Subsequent trips abroad took him to Japan, India, Persia and Egypt (1958) and to Turkey, Syria and Jordan (1961).

In the Fall of 1967, Jeannette and I returned from an extended trip through Central Europe, home of Ad's and my ancestors, and learned of Ad's death.

For us, in the words of Donne, a very large "part of the maine had been washed away by the Sea" and we were "the lesse".

Walter T. Wittman

Jan. 30, 1992.

AD REINHARDT COLLECTION

GIFT OF MR. & MRS. WALTER T. WITTMAN 1991

1. Handwritten notebook page by AR. [Ad's Romanticism during Freshman German class 1931 - WTW.] ("In paradise ...")
2. Handwritten letter from AR - 4 sides - dated "Today 1932", with envelope postmarked Sep. 12, 1932. ("Well Walt Picked up my pen ...")
3. Handwritten letter from AR - 2 sides - with envelope postmarked Sep. 20, 1932. ("Dear Walt Well, you certainly perplexed ...")
4. Handwritten letter from AR - 4 sides - with plain envelope marked "Ad's letter". [1932?] ("But Walt You misunderstand me ...")
5. Handwritten letter from AR - 2 sides. [1932?] ("Walt Best regards from Jack ...")
6. Handwritten letter from AR - 1 side. [1932?] ("Walt Eleanor Temple ...")
7. Handwritten thank you note on yellow sheet from AR; note on verso: "Dear Mom - Ad was ..." from WTW [1935 WTW.] ("Ja So Geht ...")
8. Painted Xmas card; black, red, green. "Jeanette Walt Merry Bawdy Xmas Pat Ad", 24 x 10 cms. [Nude.] (Loan.)
9. Handwritten postcard [from Crete] from AR, postmarked 12 VI 54(?) ("Nettie, Walt - Thought I'd look ...")
10. Handwritten letter from AR - 1 side. [1958?] ("Walt: 1. Greetings! 2 ...")
11. Handwritten postcard from AR, postmarked Dec. 20, 195? [Words turned into faces.]
12. Painted design on board; black & white; for reproduction?, signed Reinhardt, 19 x 20 cms. [Three-man band.]
13. Painted design on board; black and grey; for reproduction?, unsigned, 28.5 x 22 cms. [Soldier?]
14. Painted design on board; black, greys, white; for reproduction?, signed AD F, 25.5 x 8.5 cms. [Father Time, etc.]
15. Painted design on board; black & white; for reproduction?, signed AR, 12.5 x 10 cms. [Two men in top hats.]
16. Printed cover (clipped) from Soviet Russia Today, signed Darryl Frederick (AR). [Planet Earth.]
17. Printed cover (clipped) from (?) Soviet Russia Today, signed D. Frederick (AR). [Dockside scene.]

18. Printed party invitation, designed and signed by AR; for Wittman housewarming June 6, [1942].
19. The Columbia Jester v. 25, n. 1, Sept. 1934. (Ed. by A.D.F. Reinhardt; cover etc., by A.R.)
20. The Columbia Jester v. 25, n. 2, Oct. 1934. (Ed. by A.D.F. Reinhardt; cover etc., by A.R.)
21. The Columbia Jester v. 25, n. 3, Nov. 1934. (Ed. by A.D.F. Reinhardt; cover etc., by A.R.)
22. The Columbia Jester v. 25, n. 6, Feb. 1935. (Ed. by A.D.F. Reinhardt; cover etc., by A.R.)
23. The Columbia Jester v. 25, n. 8, Spring 1935. (Ed. by A.D.F. Reinhardt; cover etc., by A.R.)
24. Painted design on board; black & white; for reproduction?, signed Reinhardt, 25.5/26.5 x 24.5 cms. [War in Asia.]
25. Painted design on board; black, greys, white, pink & lilac lettering; signed Ad F Reinhardt, 14.5 x 8 cms. "To Walt .../... From Ad". [Wrestler] (Loan.)
26. Painted design on board; black, greys, white, red lettering; signed AD F, matted 10 x 12.5 cms. "To Walter from Ad". [Dancing couple, and trio.] (Loan.)
27. The Columbia Spectator v. 57, n. 140, May 17, 1934. (Front page story and picture of suppressed cartoon by AR.)
28. The Columbia Spectator: Strike issue March 28, 1935.
29. The Spectator v. 1, n. 1, March 29, 1935 (AR vote on p.1).
30. The Columbia Spectator v. 58, n. 108, April 1, 1935.
31. PAX n. 13 [196?] - folded sheet - "Documents of Modern Art" etc. by AR.
32. Watercolor on board, signed Reinhardt '38, 25.5 x 35.5 cms. [Boats, dockside.] (Loan.)
33. Mysticism: An Introspective Evaluation - Walter T. Wittman [1933]; cover design by A.R.
- [34. Ad Reinhardt Art Comics & Satires, Truman Gallery, 1976.]

Mr. & Mrs. Walter T. Wittman
kindly lent items 8, 25, 26 and 32
to the exhibition held in
the Museum Library
from November 11, 1991
to July 24, 1992.