RALSTON CRAWFORD AND JAZZ
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"Presently I find stimulation in the bullfight, and jazz music...The matador's range of expression, alone in a ring with a murderous bull is a very great thing to watch.... Another art that is new each time is jazz music, as it is now played in New Orleans, as part of a broad, profound, social expression. These expressions are, for me, deeply humanizing."

Though he is often remembered for his pre-World-War II Precisionist paintings of urban and industrial subjects, Ralston Crawford produced a significant body of work after 1949 inspired by the visual and auditory culture of New Orleans. Most of the works in this exhibition derive from subjects seen in New Orleans, but a section at the end broadens this perspective to include paintings, prints and photographs made elsewhere, whose rhythm, structure and themes relate conceptually to his interest in jazz music.

Considered the birthplace of jazz, New Orleans had a musical culture that developed from the intermingling of African music - the result of its slave history - and a variety of European influences, among them French and Spanish music. Ragtime, blues and brass band music also played a critical role in the development of early jazz. Between 1912 and 1915, the four-string banjo and saxophone were added to bands that played in dance halls and the unique blend of instruments and musical traditions resulted in what would be known as jazz.

New Orleans jazz developed its distinctive sound by incorporating a variety of structural elements, among them a strong underlying beat, the use of syncopation, polyphony and melodies residing above the beat or running counter to others. The most distinguishing rhythmic pattern is syncopation, stressing the weak beats, derived from African rhythms. Influences of German and Italian marching band music, along with other European musical forms such as jigs and polkas, are also sources. These elements helped to create a richly textured sound.

The most important characteristic of modern jazz music is the integration of improvisation - solo reinterpretations of the melody or chord progression. These distinctive musical moments allow the composition to acquire a complexity of layered, polyphonic sounds, which are then coupled with an underlying beat - a signature component of New Orleans jazz. The voices of individual instruments rise in arcs of solo melody over the underlying rhythm that supplies the momentum for the piece. Countermelodies can also be present - flowing with and against the primary melody. The soloist varies and embellishes the composition's theme with improvised passages. Short segments of repeated melody, also found in blues music, are called "riffs. Call and response, a form derived from African music and also seen in African church music, was also an important element of New Orleans jazz.

Jazz music played a significant role in Ralston Crawford's post-war work. Unlike his friend the painter, Stuart Davis, Crawford did not reference music in a literal way, but instead its influence can be seen in his use of tones and textures, and in the rhythm and syncopation of the pictorial "structures" that he built.

Crawford first encountered New Orleans when he made a trip to the Caribbean on a tramp steamer in 1926-27. However, his real engagement with the form and substance of jazz and the culture of New Orleans came in 1938, when he received a residency at the Research Studio in Maitland, Florida. It was there that he began to use his camera, both for notation, and to produce stand-alone works. During his tenure in Maitland, he took side trips to Mobile, Alabama, and New Orleans, where he photographed the docklands and other subjects. One of his earliest paintings of New Orleans is that of a grain elevator and ship at dock from 1938. This composition, which is based on a photograph

Figure 1 The Maritime Challenge at Dock, 1950-60s, gelatin silver print. (image) 6 1/7 x 9 3/7. (paper) 7 1/4 x 9 7/8 inches.
made on that trip, features a dynamic use of diagonals within an otherwise formal composition that draw the eye swiftly to a central vanishing point. A later photograph, which deals even more dramatically with contrasts of light and dark and dynamic vanishing perspective, also exists (Figure 1). The experiences he had in these Southern cities must have had a defining influence on his vision, because in that same year, Crawford submitted a proposal to the Guggenheim Foundation to create a series of paintings on “Southern negro life.” Though he did not receive the grant, and entered into military service in 1942, he frequently returned to New Orleans after World War II, and began teaching at Louisiana State University in 1949. In total, Crawford would make over 6,500 negatives of the people and environs of the Crescent City, a coinciding with a revival in interest in jazz and pre-war musicians. Crawford's expansive documentation of the jazz scene in New Orleans was an important foundation for the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane University, where a collection of around 800 of his prints reside. He worked with scholars of New Orleans jazz, Richard B. Allen and William Russell, to guide him in his choice of subjects, and clearly saw the importance of producing photographs that would help preserve its musical heritage, as well as those he could use as “nourishment” for his aesthetic investigations. Several of his photographs of New Orleans were also published in Le Jazz Hot in 1951, and used on album covers for a series published by Riverside Records in the early 1960s that archived music by artists such as Billie and DeDe Pierce, Sweet Emma, Peter Bogage, Percy Humphrey, Kid Thomas and others.

During the war years, Crawford served in the United States Army, and was responsible for creating weather maps from meteorological data. He made several paintings during his tenure in the military, which were a radical departure from his pre-war, distilled abstractions of industrial subjects, for which he had gained notoriety. These new compositions were inhabited by jagged forms and flattened shapes that suggested the twisted metal of downed airplanes and blasted buildings. (Figure 2) In the immediate years after World War II, the shattered landscapes of Europe—particularly Cologne, Germany, where he traveled in 1951—would become the subject of several paintings, prints and drawings. In 1946, he became the only artist chosen to witness the atomic bomb testing at Bikini Atoll. The experience had a profound effect on his life and he made several paintings and prints...
Figure 4. Avery "Kid" Howard, trumpet, at Mayberry's Grocery Store, June 7, 1958, gelatin silver print. (image) 6 1/4 x 9 1/2 inches, (paper) 8 x 9 15/16 inches.

on the subject. A selection of these were published in the December issue of *Fortune* magazine. He described them as "...a comment on destruction." And went on to say "They most certainly do not explain the atom bomb, nor do they give quantitative information about the ships. They refer to these facts. They refer in paint symbols to the blinding light of the blast, to its color, and mostly to its devastating character as I saw it in Bikini Lagoon." Crawford took his own experience of the blast to its limits by removing the protective glasses he was given, so that he could fully engage with the visual aftermath of the explosion. These works were about the raw emotion he felt while witnessing the blast, and contemplating its implications. It was important to the artist for his works to be charged with feeling, and the paintings and prints that Crawford produced as a result of these experiences would be some of his most overtly emotional. (Figure 3)

It is not surprising then that he found creative fodder in the exuberant culture of New Orleans, perhaps as an antidote to the weight of the war, and the implications of the Bikini tests. The vibrant music scene and rich visual opportunities of the Crescent City allowed Crawford to extend his range of pictorial investigation. So important to him was its musical culture that in 1953 he applied for another Guggenheim grant, this time to create a comprehensive photographic portrait of
jazz in New Orleans in partnership with the jazz scholar Richard Allen. The book was never realized, but Crawford continued to return to the city to make photographs, and works in other media. Allen later contributed an essay to the catalogue for a posthumous exhibition of Crawford’s New Orleans photographs at the School of the Arts, Greenave, New York in 1982.

**STREET AND NIGHTCLUB PHOTOGRAPHS**

New Orleans was the primary place where Crawford focused his attention on the human form. The photographs he produced there were candid documents of life in that vibrant community. He photographed musical performances, made strong, yet sensitive, portraits of his musician friends in their homes, and photographed funeral processions, "second line" musicians and revelers, parades featuring African-American beauty queens and folks in their Sunday whites and best suits. Acknowledging the importance of the second line—the unofficial musicians and participants in parade processions—Crawford documented countless moments of movement, music and exuberance, legitimizing the phenomenon as an important part of the cultural fabric of the city. His street photographs capture dynamics and syncopation—structural elements of jazz.

Gesture and attitude also play an important role in the second line photographs. Crawford captures heightened psychological moments that effectively provide insight into the emotions of both the artist and the subject. In his images of parades, we feel the energy and the music. Crawford was aware of photography’s effectiveness in capturing the spirit of the people: "I like the music, the people playing it, singing it and the people who get with it. Since I also like making pictures that sometimes state my reaction to the good things around me, it doesn’t surprise me that I have made several thousand negatives of these activities." However, there also exist photographs of musicians in repose, waiting to begin, or having just finished their route. These are not heroic images, but instead often show the quiet, poetic moments of anticipation before or after the parade. (Figure 4)

Crawford sought out subjects that were, for him, humanizing. Though many photographs exist in which he makes similar formal explorations to those that take shape in his paintings and prints, he dispenses with aesthetic interpretation in his photographs of the people of New Orleans, instead concentrating on creating precise documents. Crawford’s street photographs are probably the most unlike his paintings, drawings and prints in their visual construction. In these works, he responds to the subject’s circumstances, arresting the dancing figures in freeform movement. One image in particular that shows his empathy, depicts a girl on a hospital gurney who is being entertained during a Musicians’ Union-sponsored concert that included Louis Barbarin on drums, bassist Sydney Brown and trombonist Eddie Pierson. The Musicians’ Union often performed for the infirm. Shot with a flash, the image is strong in its composition, but we can see his interest is in the witnessed event, not in its aesthetics. The street and the people in it – particularly during the moments before, during and after funerals and other musical processions – also provided many opportunities for Crawford to engage in the social culture of New Orleans. In addition to photographing the performers, he also turned his attention to those who were observers. He accentuates the powerful presence of a woman with her hands on her hips by photographing her from a low vantage point, and made several engaging images of children on the street. In these images, he captured their expressions of wonder as they viewed the parade, and their playful amusement as he photographed them. (Plate 4)

In each example, he pays careful attention to the framing of the subject, either in camera, or later in the darkroom, where he sometimes made additional adjustments to the composition, enhancing our understanding of, and engagement with, the subject.

**PORTRAITS**

Crawford’s portraits are among his strongest works in the photographic medium. With a sure sensitivity for both the subject and the form, he was not afraid to move in close. His subjects fill the frame and are, in their treatment of formal elements, most like his images of grain elevators, buoys and industrial buildings. However, one cannot escape the humanity and empathy found within. Crawford made many environmental portraits that show musicians, bartenders and other friends within the context of their workplace or their home. A regular visitor to jazz establishments, Crawford was well-known and liked, and the portraits he made of them were not those of an outsider, but of a friend. The series of
photographs Crawford made of Billie and Dede Pierce in the early 1960s show the sensitivity with which he negotiated the sometimes difficult task of rendering the complexity of personality. Published on the cover of a record from the Riverside New Orleans Living Legends series of 1961, the image of the couple radiates affection and closeness. Another shot of Billie Pierce, whose smiling face fills the frame, illuminates the friendly relationship that she and Crawford must have had. This same comfort with the photographer is seen in his photograph of the drummer and trombonist, Bill Matthews, whose intense but relaxed stare engages us in the image, and in the person. Crawford’s photograph of the blind musician, Jerome Green, is a reminder of Paul Strand’s photograph, Blind Woman, 1916, whose subject similarly encompasses the limits of the photographic frame. (Figure 5). Crawford admired Strand’s work and found his compositions to be visually stimulating—even going so far as to say that Strand’s work was, in his mind, superior to that of Edward Weston. In Strand, he found a kindred spirit. Crawford’s photographic style, however, derives not from Strand, but from his own sensibility for the structuring of forms within the picture plane. (Figure 6)

Crawford also produced a number of environmental portraits of musician friends in their homes. He often spoke of seeking and seeing the humanizing elements of his subjects, and to this end, provided his sitters with a dominant role in his photographic compositions. His image of “Wooden” Joe Nicholas sitting at a piano, which is topped with a beautiful lace cloth and a collection of dolls, shows a successful man comfortable in his home. Another photograph shows Nicholas playing the saxophone with his granddaughter in the foreground and a television in the background. Nicholas experienced a revival of his career after 1949, when after a long hiatus, he began recording again as a band leader. Nicholas died in New Orleans in 1957 not long after the photograph was made. In contrast, Crawford’s photograph of Alice Zeno, the mother of clarinetist George Lewis, shows her in her bedroom surrounded by walls of peeling paint. Both the photograph

**Figure 5** Jerome Green, ca. 1950-60s, gelatin silver print. (image) 8 7/8 x 7 5/8 inches; (paper) 9 3/4 x 8 inches.

**Figure 6** Paul Strand (1890-1976) Blind, 1916, platinum print, 34 x 25.7 cm (13 3/8 x 10 1/4 in.). Alfred Stieglitz Collection, (33.43.334). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A, image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY, and Aperture Foundation.
of Zeno and that of Ann Cook, a groundbreaking singer who had a long career in New Orleans in the early 20th century, are respectfully composed and reveal Crawford’s seriousness about the medium. His pride in the image is reflected in the print, which he made in a larger format—a practice he undertook with his strongest images when he revisited them in the darkroom in the last years of his life.

In the jazz clubs, Crawford photographed musicians intensely at work—blowing on a horn or saxophone, and bending with the energy of a note. He also photographed the proprietors, and those who were reacting to the music in dance. He often monumentalized his subjects by photographing them from a low vantage point, placing them in a position of power. (Figure 7) The photographs taken in jazz clubs in the early 1950s and ’60s were made at a time when segregation was still the norm. Crawford broke color barriers by entering the African-American jazz clubs. Permits were required, and when he was not able to gain admission officially, he went regardless of the law. Though many of the photographs were taken during the New Orleans jazz revival period, Crawford felt that he was witnessing a dying art. “...thought of the musicians and poverty... Still with these people, the musicians, it is different. One forgets that they haven’t got a dime. The qualities that one cares about are the great security and sometimes nobility of these people. It may be that I am in on the end of something.” Indeed, “old timers” like “Wooden” Joe Nicholas, Lawrence Marrero, George Vital “Papa Jack” Laine and others would pass away not long after Crawford made their portraits. John H. Lawrence, Director of Museum Programs, The Historic New Orleans Collection, remarks in his essay in this catalogue that the music Crawford was hearing, and the people he was photographing, were indeed in their final days, and that he was witnessing the music’s “final flowering.”

Figure 7  Dancer at the Dew Drop Inn, La Salle Street, New Orleans, 1952, gelatin silver print, (image) 9 1/2 x 7 9/16 inches; (paper) 9 3/8 x 8 inches.

Figure 8  St. Ann Street, 1954, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches.
NEW ORLEANS ENVIRONS

It is evident that Crawford was systematic in his documentation of the jazz scene, choosing to include not only the people who made the music, but also their environs. Here he turned his camera to weathered architecture, the façades of local businesses, important jazz venues, signs, torn billboards and posters, the docklands, and the cemeteries of New Orleans. He made systematic studies of its tombs, returning to the same places several times over the years. Crawford also photographed individual vernacular structures, centering them in the picture plane as one might an artifact. (Plates 59 through 62) This treatment accentuates their presence as sculptural objects. His pre-World War II paintings, photographs and drawings of New Orleans show that he distilled subjects to their formal essence, focused on color and spatial relationships, and organized planar elements.

In his later works, Crawford also often flattened elements, rather than preserving volume. Though he never focused on producing 3-dimensional sculptures, Crawford's approach to his subjects in painting and drawing in the pre-war years showed his interest in sculptural form. In the photographs of the environs of New Orleans, one can also see Crawford's fascination for the variety of textures and tones produced by the weathered wood and the shadows that the sun casts upon them.

Other photographs within the œuvre explore the point-counterpoint of light and dark, and the spatial effects of positive and negative space as found in highlights and shadows. His images of structures are often reduced to their basic elements, as seen in Rooftop View, c. 1950s-60s or New Orleans Street, One Way, 1966. (Plates 64 and 67) In these photographs, he isolates forms and contrasts by cropping strategically, while in his paintings of the post-war years, he reduces the pictorial elements to their basic linear and planar forms without including details. Crawford investigated similar motifs in paintings and prints—among them St. Ann Street, 1954, where he created driving, moving compositions. (Figure 8) He further reduces structures to a series of simple, minimal geometric forms in the lithographs The Buildings #1, 1955, and The Buildings #2, 1955. Even people on the street, seen from a bird's eye view in the photograph Men on Sidewalk with Shadows, c. 1950s-60s, are investigated in terms of light and dark contrasts. He uses a similar approach in the photographs Ship at Dock, New Orleans, 1938, and the Maritime Challenge at Dock, 1950s-60s, which has a dynamic, single point perspective view that draws the eye quickly inward towards its center. (Plates 69 and 70)

Born in St. Catharine's, Ontario, Canada, into a household where his father was a ship's captain, Crawford's early life was heavily influenced by the industrial forms found in the docklands. Shipyards, grain silos, buoys and lobster nets would be ongoing motifs in paintings and prints throughout his career. In New Orleans, Crawford was drawn to the waterfront and photographed ships and grain elevators along the docks. Several of the photographs that
he made there would be developed into painted works.

The movement of ships on water, torn posters, blinking neon lights, parades and processions were some of the subjects that Crawford isolated and abstracted with his motion picture camera. He began making films as early as 1938, using his family as subject, however, after World War II, he began using the medium in earnest to animate what he termed otherwise static photographic images. Various Depths, a film of nearly 14 minutes, cuts disparate, overlapping scenes of a bridge, moving ships and harbor buildings, with clips of blinking neon signs, a brass band parade, the architectural details of a cathedral, and an automobile race, among other images. The River, similarly features separate "moving pictures." There, Crawford juxtaposes scenes of ships moving in a harbor, the silhouettes of passengers on a boat, details of the vestments of participants in Spain’s Santa Semana processions, and the shadows and patterns of a chain link fence. (Figure 9) Big Bayou Black is an intensive study of oscillating reflections of water surfaces, which the artist sometimes screened to a recording of Debussy's Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, though he never added the soundtrack to the film itself. The film ends with a scene with a motorcycle and rider disappearing into the distance down a centrally located rural road.

Room 331, Alfonso XII and Tom Signs are perhaps the most conceptual and abstracted of Crawford’s films. These zenlike shorts muse on the effect of movement on the quality of light and shadow and the spatial manifestations of shifting forms. While Crawford's paintings and prints are solid, commanding statements, these two films are delicate and ephemeral in their expression. The subjects to which Crawford turned his film camera will be familiar to those who know his work in other media: docks, water, juxtapositions of light and dark and shifting form. But with the addition of movement, Crawford adds another layer of cerebral substance to his formal inquiry.

Figure 11 Basin Street Cemetery, 1975.
  oil on linen,
  17 x 21 inches.

Figure 12 Basin Street, 1974.
  gelatin silver print,
  (image) 12 5/8 x 8 1/2 inches; (paper) 13 7/8 x 10 1/2 inches.
NEW ORLEANS CEMETERIES: THEME AND VARIATION

Similar interests are also elucidated in Crawford’s many photographs taken in New Orleans cemeteries. While in other areas of the city he captured a wide variety of pictorial subjects to present an overview of New Orleans and its culture, his investigation of the cemeteries—its own distinctive visual language—had him finding new images and returning to old ones in a range of thematic variations. Working through his ideas in drawing, photography, printmaking and painting, the cemeteries of New Orleans provided Crawford with a wealth of visual material with which to experiment. There, he paid careful attention to tonal contrasts, the spatial effects created by light and shadow, and the new forms these created. He also investigated details such as the wall vases, the wire or string with which they were attached, and cracks in the stucco. These elements became the basis of tight compositions. Crawford produced an entire series of paintings devoted to cemetery forms, and a large body of work in lithography, which he realized on several trips to Paris in the 1950s. His drawing books also contain finished drawings that distill the cemeteries’ visual elements to their basic forms. The precision with which he executed these works can be seen in the way he creates tonal variations with a series of close hatch marks made with pen and ink.

Crawford’s cemetery pictures provide some of the best evidence of the way Crawford translated photographic images into works in other media. Sensitive to the changes that time and weather produced, he observed: “...on to the St. Louis Cemetery, where I re-photographed many things. The differences were not based alone on a different light, but four years of aging, the rich blacks...had become rather weak-kneed gray...”33 Some are closely related, like the photograph, Vase on Tomb Shelf, 1946, and its lithographic counterpart, New Orleans #1, 1952. (Plates 95 and 96) The painting, New Orleans Cemetery, from the 1970s, similarly presents highly refined forms found in a series of photographs he made in several visits over the years. One such sequence of images recording differences over time can be viewed in photographs relating to the painting New Orleans Cemetery, 1970, which show two boxy planters embellished with a fresh new layer of tin foil in front of a clean, whitewashed wall. Another image shows the same weathered planters hanging against a peeling surface. Crawford also investigated the subject in a number of ink-on-paper drawings, which can be found in notebooks from the 1960s and 1970s. (Figure 10 and Plate 78)

Other works from the cemetery series reuse and reinteract visible forms, “selecting, reordering and recombining” elements to form the final composition.24 This process is evident in several works that feature a wall vase with a cross as a dominant motif, including the painting, New Orleans #7, 1954-56, in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the black and white lithograph, New Orleans #4, 1953, and its variant, which Crawford printed with an added passage of ochre. These works and a drawing related to the lithograph, demonstrate how he often revisited themes and images over the years. The jagged forms of wall cracks seen in the painting New Orleans #7 are a reminder of several paintings and prints Crawford made directly after World War II, a reaction to the destruction he had witnessed abroad. The New Orleans #4 lithographs, made one year before the painting, on the other hand, exhibit a distilled series of flattened forms. Basin Street Cemetery, a painting Crawford made in 1975, also shows how he reinterprets existing visual elements. In this work, he has taken the basic forms found in the photograph Basin Street, 1974, and rendered these in yellow, red-ochre and blue to create a vibrant, polyrhythmic composition. In contrast, the painting’s photographic counterpart is a simple, graphic composition with a black iron cross against a background of various tones of grey-to-black. (Figures 11 and 12)

Ralston Crawford produced over 100 lithographs in the years after World War II. In 1951, he made a trip to Europe where he visited Spain and witnessed the incredible destruction of the city of Cologne, Germany, which was reduced to rubble. He articulated his experiences in 11 prints in the lithography studio of Edmond Desjoubert. In the workshop, Crawford was free to experiment: “Techniques should not be limited to the articulation of existing conceptions, but technical discoveries can be deeply related to the process of the picture and make the ideas soar. The techniques involved in the medium of lithography have had an emancipatory effect on my entire function as an artist;” he would write.25 In addition to the production of the lithographs that deal with the aftermath of the war and its effect on the landscape, Crawford produced his first print inspired by the jazz city, New Orleans #1, 1952, which was based on a photograph.
Figure 13 The Glass #5, c. 1959, color lithograph with gouache, unique print, 
(plate) 20 3/8 x 15 1/2, 
(paper) 26 x 20.

Figure 14 The Glass #5, c. 1959, color lithograph, artist’s proof, 
(plate) 20 3/8 x 15 1/2, 
(paper) 26 x 20.

Figure 15 New Orleans Tomb, 1952, ink on tracing paper, 
7 3/8 x 11 1/2 inches.
Figure 16 Third Avenue Elevated #1A, 1951, lithograph (black), (plate) 10 7/8 x 17 3/8 inches; (paper) 13 x 19 3/8 inches.

Figure 17 Still from the Film, Various Depths, c. 1965-1971.
he had made right after the war's end. He returned to Paris again in 1953, after a year of teaching at Louisiana State University in New Orleans, where he immersed himself in the visual culture of the city. He took back to Paris the strong visual experiences that he gained there, and in 1954, he created *The Glass #1*, the first print in which the cemetery vase played a dominant role. In this work, as well as *The Glass #2*, #3 and #4, made between 1954 and 1955, he found a multitude of visual possibilities in a simple pressed glass vase. In this group, Crawford actively experimented with tusche, crayon, scraping and acid on a lithographic stone. The plate of *The Glass #3* would be reworked and printed three times, resulting in prints with very different pictorial sensibilities. Additional compositions featuring a glass, this time created from a series of fractured shard-like shapes, were realized in the prints *The Glass #5A*, 1959, printed in black, and *The Glass #5*, printed in blue, grey and ochre. (Figures 13 and 14) He also reinterpreted some of the forms found in *The Glass #5* into a vertical composition of black and blue, creating two states: *The Glass #6A* and #6. (Plates 103 and 104)

The improvised cemetery vases and the wires by which they are fixed to the walls are a recurring motif in Crawford's photographs and lithographs. In most cases, everyday castoffs like glass jars or metal cans were used, and were bound to the tomb walls with thin wire. Slightly fancier vessels made of pressed glass, like those seen in *The Glass #2*, #3 and #4, could also be found. Crawford was fascinated by the many visual opportunities that lay in these simple objects. Like the delicate line drawings that he made on translucent paper, which in their economy of line revealed only the most distilled forms, several photographs of cemetery vases also support his investigation into the nature of the line by making the wires themselves dominant in the composition. (Figure 15 and plates 82-84)

**IMPROVISATION**

During his career, Crawford produced large bodies of work on single visual themes. His series of lithographic compositions riffing on a glass cemetery vase is perhaps the best example, but his series of seven prints that feature a variety of "collaged" elements of tone and texture, exhibit a level of improvisation not seen in works in other media. The *Collage series*, made in the Mourlot and Detroit studios in Paris over 1954 and 1955, shows Crawford experimenting with a combination of rubbings of the wooden studio floor and other textures on transfer paper, and cut elements, coupled with applications of tusche, gouache and crayon. Here he recomposed textures and elements, cutting and pasting them into collages and applying the final transfer paper compositions to zinc plates, which were then printed in editions. These works are a reminder of subjects he dealt with in several photographs of similar spirit, among them *Adler's Men's Wear*, ca. 1950s-60s, *Tom Signs*, 1967, and the film, *Tom Signs*.

**THE WORLD BEYOND**

The inspiration that Crawford took from the visual and auditory culture of New Orleans extended to subjects outside the boundaries of the Crescent City. Indeed, many of the works he made after World War II have polyrhythmic qualities, described by one essayist as "jazzy." More than once, Crawford mentioned musical references when he spoke of, or wrote on his work: "I am very much interested in a kind of pictorial counterpoint - the juxtaposing of one melody or theme in relation to another, or to several. It is out of this argument or contrast that I believe interest is created in pictorial structure." This is evident in the works he made that were inspired by railroad cars, elevated train tracks, fishing nets and lobster traps; that he saw in New York, Minneapolis, St. Gilles, France and Seville, Spain. In these, Crawford uses strong diagonal lines, and forms and colors that play in opposition to one another, to create tension and movement within the picture plane.

The group of works inspired by elevated train tracks is probably most akin to a visual interpretation of the sound structures of New Orleans jazz music in their ordered rhythms. They display, as Barbara Haskell writes in her 1985 essay on Crawford for the Whitney Museum retrospective, "a dynamic contradictory spatial network by having shapes advance and recede simultaneously." In *Third Avenue Elevated #1*, 1951, Crawford reduces the wooden track support to a series of black and white staccato forms, which move rhythmically across the picture plane. (Figure 16) The lithographs *Third Avenue Elevated #3*, #4 and #5 from 1951 and 1952 show him investigating the subject in three colorforms. In #5, he employs a subtle use of grays with black, and then in #3 and #4 he uses a bolder
application of color, choosing grays against red in one, and a darker grey and white against yellow in the other. Third Avenue Elevated #1, is printed in two variations: black on white, and black on yellow. These are a reminder of a passage from his film Various Depths, in which Crawford focuses the camera’s attention on a night scene filled with numerous blinking neon signs that flicker across the picture plane. (Figure 17)

Important in these prints is the notion of order, which is a recurring theme throughout Crawford’s work. However the “order,” as he terms it, is the tempo of modern life. “The order that concerned me in painting these pictures is not that of naturalistic landscape paintings, but one that may have certain properties more closely connected with twentieth-century living.” He goes on to list several “properties of the twentieth century,” among them the clarinet playing of New Orleans musician George Lewis. He continues, “Consequently, new pictorial juxtapositions emerge when the pictures are painted by men who belong to their time. So modern activities, among many others, are of interest to me in my painting, and are of value insofar as they bring substance to the order which I aim to build.”

After World War II, Crawford’s paintings became more animated. Using juxtapositions of reinterpreted and reordered forms, he created works that were less about the reduction of a subject to its formal essence, and more about the feeling engendered by a particular scene. Related to the Third Avenue Elevated compositions are a series of later lithographs from his St. Gilles series of 1962. In the St. Gilles prints, the wooden slats of lobster traps and fish netting are dissected and reordered to create syncopated compositions in which the lines and forms push and pull against one another. In contrast to the stable lines of rhythm seen in the Third Avenue Elevated prints, these works can be viewed as embodying a kind of ordered chaos. (Figure 18)

Corpus Christi II, 1976, uses diagonal forms to disrupt an otherwise vertical composition, thereby creating tension and movement in the picture plane. In this painting, the artist employs white- and red-ochre forms to counter the
complementary colors blue and yellow. In the last years of his life, Crawford traveled to Seville, Spain, where he observed the processions of the Santa Semana, Seville’s Holy Week. In the week leading up to Easter, traditional processions composed of participants belonging to brotherhoods of Catholic laypersons, move through the streets of Seville. They wear garments with pointed hoods called capirotes, and some, who are penitents, carry crosses. Sometimes, music accompanies the procession with a drum and trumpet or a brass band playing religious hymns or marches. The parallels with his experiences in New Orleans, particularly his documentation of parades and second line processions are, of course, vivid. Crawford also integrated abstracted elements of the Santa Semana parade in the film The River, training the camera on the points of the hoods and staffs of the penitents to create rhythmic moments of shade and light. Produced towards the end of his life, the works which feature the Santa Semana processions as their subject, are particularly moving. (Figure 19)

New Orleans and the jazz music that infused it was a central incubator for Ralston Crawford after World War II. In its sights and sounds, Crawford found “nourishment” for his aesthetic investigations. “Whenever I have been abroad,” Crawford wrote, “the thought that there is a New Orleans in America has always eased the idea of returning. This city is not simply ‘interesting’ or ‘stimulating,’ but an object of my affection. The music is a part of the New Orleans I love. I must emphasize that my interest in the music is related to a particular social interest... Being a painter, I am often asked if I find any specific relationship between jazz music and my painting. I would say that the two expressions have one thing in common – they place a great deal of emphasis on the importance of individual expression, and the spirit and forms of New Orleans music, being good things, feed my work because they nourish me.”52 The time he spent in that vibrant city would inform the inflection of his work in later years, which after World War II even more deeply expressed his inner life. The emotion underlying these later works is unmistakable. They illuminate a world in which the visual, auditory, emotional and aesthetic are intertwined.

Ralston Crawford died of cancer in 1978. He was buried in St. Louis Cemetery, New Orleans, with a full brass band funeral.
NOTES:


3. Ibid, 16.


5. Ibid, 28.


8. Ibid, p.45. Haskell in her essay cites his interest in jazz: "...his immediate infatuation with the music might have been predicted: as early as 1938 he had notified the Guggenheim Foundation of his desire to paint southern black life, and during the late 1930s and 1940s he and Peggy had passed long hours with Stuart and Roselle Davis listening to jazz recordings."


13. Ibid, p. 11.


16. Matthews made his debut as a drummer in 1917 with the Excelsior Brass Band. He took up trombone in the early 1920s and toured with Jelly Roll Morton. He was also a member of the Original Tuxedo Orchestra and recorded with Papa Celestin.


8. Op. cit., Haskell, p. 13. Most of the photographs in the collection are printed to 8 x 10 inches, though a selection of exhibition prints exist in larger formats, up to 24 x 30 inches.

9. Conversation with Neelon Crawford, Summer, 2010. Neelon Crawford also mentions this in the foreword to this catalogue.


12. Ralston Crawford, "A Modern Artist Explains the Relationship Between his Photography and Painting." Modern Photography, 13 (September 1949), p. 77, quoted in Haskell, p. 120.


16. Collage #1, (1st State), ed. 10, 1 tp.; Collage #1, (2nd State), 1 tp.; Collage #1, (3rd State), ed. 6; Collage #2, ed. 25, 7 a.p.; Collage #3, ed. 15, 3 a.p.; Collage #4, ed. 25, 1 a.p.; Collage #5, ed. 25, 1 a.p.; Collage #5, ed. 25, 1 a.p.; Collage #6, ed. 25, 1 a.p.; Collage #7, ed. 25, 2 a.p.


This essay is dedicated to my late husband, Guy Pierre Bour (1957-2011), who lovingly supported me in all my endeavors.