

About this issue's cover:

Portraitist Robert Henri is well known in the history of American modernism for promoting a succession of juryless, artist-organised exhibitions during the first two decades of the twentieth century and for influencing hundreds of students through his teaching.¹ Specifically, his style of painting, which emphasised artistic spontaneity through the quick application of paint, had a wide impact. Henri regarded his expressive palette as synonymous with 'individuality and freedom in art', a stance which led him to anarchism, most likely in the late 1880s, when he was living in France (Henri, who was fluent in French, resided in Paris over three extended periods: 1888-1891; 1895; and 1898-1900).² Evidence of anarchism's importance for Henri is legion. For example, his close friend and fellow artist John Sloan, who first met him in 1892, recalled he 'was an anarchist and had no sympathy with my devotion to socialism' (Sloan would later become active in the American Socialist Party in 1910 and run twice as a Socialist Party candidate for the New York State legislature).³ In keeping with this position, in 1893 Henri gave Sloan Mikhail Bakunin's *God and the State* (1882), a passionately argued condemnation of State power and institutional religion as mechanisms of class oppression.⁴ Linda Jones Gibbs has documented Henri's encounters with anarchist street militancy in Paris during the 1890s and argues, convincingly, that his early denunciations of the Salon system and academic values evolved in tandem with support for anarchist-led demonstrations and strikes.⁵ In 1906 Henri was advising his students to consult Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art?* (1898), in which the renegade Christian anarchist called for work capable of rousing the masses that broke with the power structures of its day by asserting an 'authentic' expressionism rooted in the artist's personality.⁶ Peter Kropotkin was another important influence: in 1914 we find Henri hanging his own paintings alongside a portrait of Kropotkin and others (Tolstoy, Walt Whitman) in the lecture hall of the anarchist-run Ferrer Center and Modern School in Harlem, New York.⁷

Artists associated with the movement caught his attention as well. In the late 1880s, while living in Paris, he was particularly taken with the French neo-impressionists, who spearheaded the path-breaking artist-organized, juryless *Independents Salon* and developed an aesthetic to complement their political outlook.⁸ However Emma Goldman, whom Henri befriended in 1911, was the key figure. Describing her as 'a great and noble woman' after attending a talk in Toledo, Ohio on January 29 and leaving his card, he was so enthralled that he purchased her book, *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1907), at the lecture and read it in one sitting on the train back to New York.⁹ Goldman was the catalyst that drew Henri

into the American branch of the movement. That fall he began attending her New York lectures, and they met in person after Henri introduced himself, telling her he read and 'enjoyed' Goldman's *Mother Earth* journal.¹⁰ Discovering he had 'an anarchist concept of art and its relationship to life', she invited him to teach at the Ferrer Center, where Henri held a free weekly art class (life classes on Tuesday and Friday evenings, lectures on painting Sunday morning) from 1912 to 1918.¹¹ He would go on to serve on the centre's Advisory Board (along with Goldman and Berkman).¹² Additionally, Henri, accompanied by his wife, Marjorie Organ, supported Goldman during her trial for disseminating birth control information in April 1916.¹³ Goldman also shared Henri's admiration for Walt Whitman, whose libertarian sexuality and expansive conception of a multi-ethnic America infused with 'comradeship' enjoyed some *câché* in the anarchist movement.¹⁴

Another bond was Ralph Waldo Emerson, whom Henri admired.¹⁵ One of the most forceful passages in *Anarchism and Other Essays* ends citing Emerson, merging his individualism with an anarchist-communist conception of sociality. This is the argument that captivated Henri in 1911. 'Anarchism', writes Goldman:

... is the only philosophy which brings to man the consciousness of himself; which maintains that God, the State, and society are non-existent, that their promises are null and void, since they can be fulfilled only through man's subordination. Anarchism is therefore the teacher of the unity of life; not merely in nature, but in man. There is no conflict between the individual and the social instincts, any more than there is between the heart and the lungs: the one the receptacle of a precious life essence, the other the repository of the element that keeps the essence pure and strong. The individual is the heart of society, conserving the essence of social life; society is the lungs which are distributing the element to keep the life essence – that is, the individual – pure and strong.

'The one thing of value in the world', says Emerson, 'is the active soul; this every man contains within him. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth and creates'. In other words, the individual instinct is the thing of value in the world. It is the true soul that sees and creates the truth alive, out of which is to come a still greater truth, the re-born social soul.¹⁶

Henri's respect for Goldman was such that he would ask her to sit for a portrait in late March 1915 after her release from jail for propagating birth control.¹⁷ Henri completed three versions, but in the 1930s Henri's sole heir, Violet Organ, destroyed all three.¹⁸ Goldman recalled vivid discussions of 'art, literature and libertarian education' during the sessions as Henri sought to capture 'the real Emma

Goldman'.¹⁹ This issue's cover is a photograph of one of the lost portraits. I discovered it reproduced in the catalogue for the Detroit Museum of Art's *Second Annual Exhibition of Selected Work by American Artists* held in May 1916. It was the sole work submitted by Henri for the exhibition.

Allan Antliff

NOTES

1. Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp12-13.
2. Robert Henri, 'Progress in Our National Art Must Spring from the Development of Individuality of Ideas and Freedom of Expression: A Suggestion for a New Art School', *The Craftsman* 4 (January 1909): 387-401. On Henri in Paris, see 'Robert Henri, Chronology', *John Sloan/Robert Henri: Their Philadelphia Years, 1886-1904*, Deborah Allen (ed.), (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art, 1976), pp59-60.
3. Helen Farr Sloan, 'John Sloan discussing Robert Henri (notes taken 1949/1951)', *John Sloan/Robert Henri: Their Philadelphia Years, 1886-1904*, 31; see also 'John Sloan Chronology', in *ibid*, pp49-53.
4. William Innes Homer, *Robert Henri and His Circle*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), p78; see also Mikhail Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York: Freeport Press, 1971).
5. Linda Jones Gibbs, 'Robert Henri and the Cosmopolitan Culture of Fin-de-Siècle France', PhD. Diss., (City University of New York, 1999), pp201-230.
6. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), pp118-19; pp120-23.
7. Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, p26.
8. *Ibid*, pp18-20.
9. Entry, 'Toledo', Robert Henri Dairy, Sunday, 29 January 1911, *Robert Henri Papers*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll 886, frame 480. Entry, 'Emma Goldman', Robert Henri Dairy, Monday, 30 January 1911, *Robert Henri Papers*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll 886, frame 481.
10. Henri introduced himself in September or early October; see Emma Goldman, *Living My Life: Vol. 2* (New York: Dover, 1970), p528.
11. Robert Henri Diary, Monday, 30 October 1911, *Robert Henri Papers*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, microfilm roll 886, frame 573. See Goldman, *Living My Life, Vol. 2*, pp528-29 (Goldman on Henri); Antliff, p27.
12. Modern School and Francisco Ferrer Association stationary lists Henri on the advisory board. See Manual Komroff to Robert Henri, 1 March 1915, Box 5, *Robert*

Henri Papers, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

13. Their names appear in the beginning of transcript of the trial proceedings published in *Mother Earth*; see 'EMMA GOLDMAN BEFORE THE BAR: THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK against Emma Goldman, April 20, 1916', *Mother Earth* 6, 3 (1916): 496.
14. Goldman belonged to the International Walt Whitman Fellowship; 'Dinner of Whitman Fellows', *The Sun*, Thursday, June 1, 1905, 2. On Henri, see Ruth. L. Bohan, 'Robert Henri, Walt Whitman, and the American Artist', *Walt Whitman Quarterly* 29, 4 (2012): 131-151.
15. See Joseph J. Kwiat, 'Robert Henri and the Emerson-Whitman Tradition', *PMLA* no. 71 (1956), pp617-36.
16. Emma Goldman, 'Anarchism: What it Really Stands For', *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910), p58.
17. Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henri: His Life and Art*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), p118.
18. *Ibid*, p138.
19. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life Vol. 2*, p529.