



Lamar Dodd
American, 1909 - 1996

Winter Valley

1944

oil on canvas

overall: 97.3 x 128.1 cm (38 5/16 x 50 7/16 in.)

framed: 119.4 x 149.2 x 7 cm (47 x 58 3/4 x 2 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Lamar Dodd / 1944

Anonymous Gift 1971.3.1

ENTRY

In 1937, 26-year-old Lamar Dodd was invited to serve as artist-in-residence at the University of Georgia in Athens, a town with a population of about 18,000 located on a hill above the Oconee River. He accepted the position and was appointed chairman of the art department the following year. Over the next decade he invited such noted American artists as Boardman Robinson, Thomas Hart Benton, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi to the campus. Dodd stated that his objective was “to produce not just a sensational regional scene, but to revive an interest in the truth of things.” [1] By 1949 he had transformed the University of Georgia’s art department into one of the best in the Southeast. Dodd was an active presence in the Athens community who brought this transformation about, as *Life* magazine expressed it, in “an un-bohemian way.” [2]

Discussing *Winter Valley*, Dodd remarked, “I have no hesitation in saying that I consider this to be one of my best canvases.” [3] It is the sequel to his *A View of Athens*, a painting that was greeted with critical acclaim after it was exhibited at the 1939 World’s Fair in New York and purchased by IBM in 1940. [4] In both paintings Dodd has represented Athens as a semiurban industrial community rather than the

genteel Southern university town described in a contemporary guidebook: “Greek porticoes with pediments and large Doric columns are the dominant architectural feature. Old-fashioned boxwood gardens, towering oaks and elms, and white-blossomed magnolias with their sweet, heavy perfume, all embody the romantic traditions of the Deep South.” [5] Dodd’s deeply rooted affinity for the South, and more specifically his native Georgia and the landscape surrounding Athens, is evident in his own detailed description of *Winter Valley*:

The painting was done from a railroad in East Athens along the Seaboard Railroad. I made many drawings on that subject. I studied that subject mornings, afternoons and evenings. The houses in the foreground for the most part were between North Avenue, which used to be Madison Avenue, and the railroad. Some exist today, some have been abandoned. I was fascinated by the monumental quality of the city. . . . I think if you look rather closely at the picture you will see three significantly tall structures. One the spire of the Methodist Church; a suggestion of the City Hall dome; and one of a vertical water tower which has been replaced. Those objects are not necessarily in the correct geographical order as they were. I think the artist has the privilege of moving things to enhance his design. [6]

Elsewhere he provided a more personal commentary on the painting: “This happens to be one of my favorite paintings of all periods. . . . Of course, I saw the city in my own way—a contemporary way. I was impressed by the chilly, clean air—broken by the floating streams of white smoke drifting across the valley. As I worked on the drawings, I enjoyed my own remote loneliness in relation to the drama of humanity that was there in front of me.” [7]

Painted during the Great Depression and World War II, Dodd’s views of Athens and the surrounding countryside are often tinged with a subtle melancholy that matched the somber tenor of the times. Dodd frequently depicted African American communities in the South, and in *Winter Valley* he has focused on the eastern section of Athens where the majority of the city’s black residents lived near the industrial plants in which they worked.

Winter Valley drew upon the urban realism practiced by George Luks—Dodd’s former teacher and a member of The Eight—as well as the views expressed by

Robert Henri in *The Art Spirit*. [8] And, as was generally the case with Luks, Henri, and other prominent urban realists like George Bellows, Dodd, while he frankly depicted the conditions of modern life, did not intend to convey any explicit social or political message. Dodd's predilection for representing the Deep South was also influenced by the currency of regionalism, an interest cemented by his association with two of its greatest proponents: Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry. In addition to the Ashcan school and the regionalists, *Winter Valley* was further inspired by Dodd's reverence for the old masters. Dodd himself credited the scene's ominous, brooding quality to his close study of El Greco's *View of Toledo* [fig. 1]:

I'm a great admirer of El Greco and when I looked at our city and saw the Methodist spire, the dome of City Hall, the monumental view of the hillside, I couldn't help of thinking of El Greco's *View of Toledo*. During the time I worked on the painting, I actually went back and studied certain qualities of his paintings. I made numerous drawings of the scene to the right of Madison Avenue, which was potentially one of the most beautiful sections of Athens. [9]

Dodd's belief that "the artist has the privilege of moving things to enhance his design" and is not required to make a topographically accurate representation of the city may have been prompted by his familiarity with the art historian Harry B. Wehle's description of El Greco's famous painting as a "violently imaginative conception of Toledo [in which] El Greco has sacrificed the actual arrangement of the city's buildings for dramatic effect." [10] Nevertheless, a photograph of Dodd sitting on or near the vantage point from which he painted *Winter Valley* [fig. 2] and a map of the city [fig. 3] suggest that the view was quite accurate.

Ultimately, however, *Winter Valley* cannot be understood as the sum of its influences or judged on the basis of its fidelity to nature. The painting's restrained color scheme, high horizon, and intricately structured composition, with the rhythmic geometric forms of the rows of small houses echoed by the gently undulating coils of smoke that emanate from the shacks and rise into the somber, overcast sky, produce a memorable effect. As the art historian Gudmund Vigtel has noted, *Winter Valley* is "a major example of Dodd's intellectual program as a painter, flavored by his emotional involvement with the subject." [11]

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 El Greco, *View of Toledo*, c. 1597, oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929



fig. 2 John Dominis, Art teacher Lamar Dodd conducting outdoor class, *LIFE Magazine*, 19167, The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

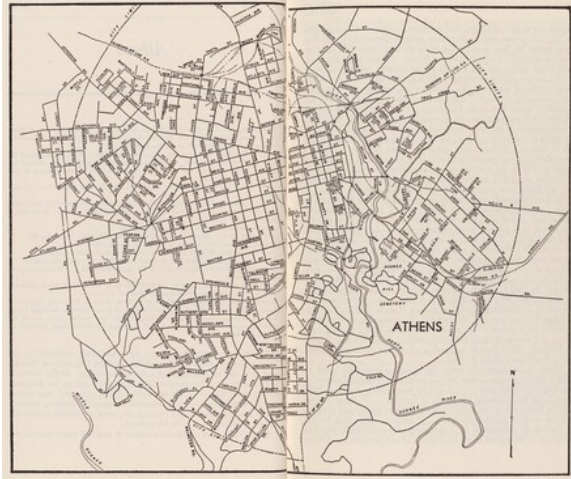


fig. 3 Map of Athens from *Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside* (Atlanta, 1940), 2–3

NOTES

- [1] Lamar Dodd, "The Truth in Things," *Magazine of Art*, Mar. 1942, 104.
- [2] "Lamar Dodd: In an Un-Bohemian Way He Sparks an Art Movement in the South," *Life*, Sept. 26, 1949, 62.
- [3] Lamar Dodd to J. Carter Brown, Dec. 29, 1970, NGA curatorial files.
- [4] *A View of Athens* was reproduced as a full-page color illustration in "Lamar Dodd," *Life*, Sept. 26, 1949, 64–65. It had also been illustrated in Maude Riley, "Carnegie Institute Opens Exciting Survey of American Painting," *Art Digest* 19 (Oct. 15, 1944): 7, and Howard Thomas, "Lamar Dodd, Southern Painter," *American Artist* 10 (Feb. 1946): 12.
- [5] *Georgia: A Guide to Its Towns and Countryside* (Athens, GA, 1940), 147.
- [6] Lamar Dodd to Mary Levin Koch, May 5, 1989, NGA curatorial files.
- [7] "Dodd: An Athens Portfolio," *Athens* 2 (Fall 1970): 23.
- [8] For a discussion of Dodd's interest in Henri and The Eight, see William U. Eiland, *The Truth of Things: The Life and Career of Lamar Dodd* (Athens, GA, 1996), 13–20.
- [9] Jerry L. Cain and Donald A. Smith, "The Chambers Column," *Athens* 2 (Fall 1970): 3.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

American Paintings, 1900–1945

[10] Harry B. Wehle, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Catalogue of Italian, Spanish, and Byzantine Paintings* (New York, 1940), 231.

[11] Gudmund Vigtel, *100 Years of Painting in Georgia* (Atlanta, GA), 1992, 40.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The plain-weave fabric support has been lined with wax and remounted on a nonoriginal stretcher. The bottom tacking margin is stamped “PERMALBA PRIMED WEBER CANVAS NO. 2.” The fabric was coated with a thick, smoothly applied, commercially prepared, white ground. The artist applied paint broadly and fluidly, wet into wet, with a brush or a palette knife, so a great deal of texture is evident throughout most of the painting. In contrast, the final layers of paint—which define the trees and the fence—were applied with fine, controlled brushwork wet over dry. Although the surface reveals impasto lying below the visible paint surface, suggesting the artist’s changes, neither the X-radiograph nor the infrared examination identified anything specific. The paint layer is in good condition, with minor losses and some crackle because of the thick paint. There is a small loss at the left edge of the painting that may have been repainted by the artist, because the paint is consistent with the area surrounding it. The surface is coated with a thin layer of natural resin varnish. The appearance of the painting is marred by wax residue that was caught in the interstices of the paint layer during the lining process.

PROVENANCE

Anonymous gift 1971 to NGA.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1944 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings, John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, March–April 1944, no. 16.

1944 *Painting in the United States, 1944*, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, October–December 1944, no. 50, repro.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART ONLINE EDITIONS

American Paintings, 1900–1945

1945 Grand Central Art Galleries, New York, 1945.

1945 Loan for display with permanent exhibition, Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, 1945-1970 [except for periods of loan to special exhibitions].

1950 [Lamar Dodd exhibition], travelling exhibition, 1950-1951.

1970 Lamar Dodd: A Retrospective Exhibition, High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, 1970-1971, no. 22, repro.

1972 Extended loan for use by The Supreme Court of the United States, Washington, D.C., 1972-1973.

1973 Extended loan for use by the Speaker of the House, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1973-1976.

1977 Extended loan for use by Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, D.C., 1977-1979.

1989 Extended loan for use by Secretary Clayton Yeutter, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., 1989-1991.

1996 A Shared Vision: The Life and Art of Lamar Dodd, Lamar Dodd Art Center, LaGrange, Georgia, 1996, no 57.

1998 American Light: Selections from the National Gallery of Art, Art Museum of Western Virginia, Roanoke, 1998, no catalogue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1970 "Dodd: An Athens Portfolio." *Athens* 2, no. 4 (Fall 1970): 23, repro.
- 1971 Elsen, Patricia, ed. "College Museum Notes." *Art Journal* 31, no. 1 (1971): 85, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 143, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 159, repro.
- 1992 Thomas, Frances Taliaferro. *A Portrait of Historic Athens and Clarke County*. Athens, GA, 1992: 190-191, repro.
- 1992 Vigtel, Gudmund. *100 Years of Painting in Georgia*. Atlanta, 1992: 40,

repro. 41.

To cite: Robert Torchia, “Lamar Dodd/*Winter Valley*/1944,” *American Paintings, 1900–1945*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/52399> (accessed November 12, 2019).