



Allen Tucker  
American, 1866 - 1939

## *Bizarre*

1928

oil on canvas

overall: 77 x 64.1 cm (30 5/16 x 25 1/4 in.)

framed: 76.8 x 64.1 cm (30 1/4 x 25 1/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left: Allen Tucker

Gift of the Allen Tucker Memorial 1971.13.1

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### ENTRY

Allen Tucker's early work reflects the influence of both the French impressionists and the American impressionist John Henry Twachtman (American, 1853 - 1902), his former teacher at the Art Students League. Having attended the Armory Show in 1913, Tucker became fascinated by the work of Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853 - 1890) and began to move away from the impressionist concern with directly capturing the play of light and color in nature and toward a more subjective, expressive, postimpressionist style. John I. H. Baur has noted that "Tucker, who had studied with Twachtman, found in Van Gogh (as William Glackens found in Renoir) the means to a personal transformation of impressionism, although the work of both men was a little overshadowed by unavoidable comparisons with their sources." [1]

Painted while Tucker was a lecturer on composition at the Art Students League, this half-length image of a young, modern woman—the era's iconic flapper with bobbed hair, cloche hat, and loose-fitting, short-sleeved blouse—is a leading example of the artist's mature postimpressionist style. The flat forms, dark contours, emphasis on decorative surface pattern, heavy impasto, and bold color recall the portraits that Van Gogh painted in Arles and Saint-Rémy. The work is part of a series of images of glamorous figures, including *Bagdad* [fig. 1], *The Soviette* (1925), and *The Orange Book* (undated, The Phillips Collection), that essentially repurpose Van Gogh's style for the roaring twenties in America.

The title of the Gallery's painting, *Bizarre*, alludes to the sitter's unconventional pose, intense gaze, and boldly patterned blouse. She sits sideways on a chair, rests her hands on its backrest, and turns her head to look directly at the viewer.

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The unusual composition brings to mind the critic Forbes Watson’s analysis that “the sweep of a big design clearly excites [Tucker] more than any detail of nature.” [2] Another critic observed that Tucker’s postimpressionist portraits are “studies in pattern and design” [3] rather than likenesses of specific individuals.

Robert Torchia

August 17, 2018

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**COMPARATIVE FIGURES**



**fig. 1** Allen Tucker, *Bagdad*, 1924, oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Allen Tucker Memorial

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**NOTES**

- [1] John I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 85.
  - [2] Forbes Watson, *Allen Tucker* (New York, 1932), 12–13.
  - [3] James W. Lane, “Vincent in America: Allen Tucker; Whitney Memorial to a U.S. Post-Impressionist,” *Art News* 38 (Dec. 16, 1939): 13.
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**TECHNICAL SUMMARY**

The painting is executed on a medium- to heavy-weight, plain-weave canvas that exhibits many inconsistencies in its weave that appear as high points. It is still stretched on its original stretcher. The ground is thin, white, and smooth, and continues to the edges of all the tacking margins, indicating that the canvas was commercially prepared. A preliminary lay-in with rough, angular contours and a few of the features, such as the eyes, nose, and mouth, is visible with infrared examination. [1] This sketch is more angular than the painted image and, in general,

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a bit larger. The head may have been drawn slightly forward of its final painted position. No x-radiographic examination was conducted. Overall the paint is directly applied in flowing brushstrokes that accumulate impasto at their edges. The artist seems to have preferred a clean, sharp line to define his contours, having often reworked back and forth to clarify his edges. Ultraviolet examination indicates that the even, clear, glossy varnish is a synthetic resin. Preliminary pigment identification using fiber optic reflectance spectroscopy finds that the greens are viridian, the orange and yellow are earth pigments, and the white is a combination of zinc and lead. The painting is in excellent condition with no significant paint losses and only a few small brown accretions scattered over the painting.

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## TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The infrared examination was conducted using a Santa Barbara Focalplane InSb camera fitted with a J astronomy filter.

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## PROVENANCE

The artist [1866-1939]; by inheritance to his wife, Mrs. Allen Tucker [1870-1971, née Eufrosia Aguilar Leland Wesson], New York; The Allen Tucker Memorial, New York; [1] gift 1971 to NGA.

[1] The Allen Tucker Memorial was established in 1944 by the artist's widow; it was transferred in 1980 to the Art Students League.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1965 The Twenties Revisited, Gallery of Modern Art, New York, 1965, unnumbered catalogue.

1966 Allen Tucker 1866-1939: Centennial Exhibition, The Milch Galleries, New York, 1966, no. 14.

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1992 Extended loan for use by John C. Kornblum, U.S. Representative to the Conference and Security Commission of Europe, Vienna, Austria, 1992-1994.

1994 Extended loan for use by Samuel Brown, U.S. Representative to the Conference and Security Commission of Europe, Vienna, Austria, 1994-1998.

2005 Extended loan for use by Secretary Margaret Spellings, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2005-2008.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1932 Watson, Forbes. *Allen Tucker*. New York, 1932: 32-33, repro.
- 1980 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1980: 251, repro.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 370, repro.

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