

## ABSTRACT

### The Artist as “Is”: A Creative and Critical Analysis of the Aesthetics of E.E. Cummings in his Poetry and Painting

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Director: Luke Ferretter, Ph D.: Twentieth Century American and British Literature

Edward Estlin Cummings, more commonly known as E.E. Cummings, dedicated his life to the pursuit of remaining in an active state of creating, and therefore experimented with a plethora of artistic mediums including, but not limited to, poetry and painting. Although he is primarily known for his poetry, in which his unconventional experimentation with grammar, punctuation and spelling brought him much attention, his passion for painting equally served as an effective method of self-expression for the avant-garde artist. Regarding his obsession with aesthetics, Cummings wrote in a series of his “nonlectures” for the students of his Alma Mater, Harvard University, “so far as I am concerned, poetry and every other art was and is and forever will be strictly and distinctly a question of individuality... (as it happens) poetry is being, not doing.” By analyzing both a poem and a painting from five different periods of his life, I seek to find the instances in which the relationship between Cummings as a human being and Cummings as an artist coalesce. These instances within his art, in which his intellectual pursuits yield visceral sensations for both himself and his readers define who he was: an authentically unique individual dedicated to spreading feeling, truth and beauty. As I also uphold and desire to share these virtues, I will follow each pair of analyses with an original poem and painting inspired by Cummings’ works because, as he believed, to create is to feel, and “to feel something is to be alive.”

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THE ARTIST AS “IS.” A CREATIVE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE  
AESTHETICS OF E.E. CUMMINGS IN HIS POETRY AND PAINTING

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Other professors I would like to extend my thanks to are Dr. Tom Hanks, Dr. Joshua King, Dr. Joe Fulton and Dr. Richard Russell in the English Department. I thank each of them for teaching me to believe in the goodness of the world, the sacredness of art, the infallibility of the human heart, and the importance of an enlightened mind in each of their classrooms. Lastly, I thank Dr. Andrew Wisely, Dr. Albert Beck and Ms. Diane Haun in the Honors Program for their patience and encouragement. I would like to thank them for allowing me to participate in this program, and work on this project; they have given me a family here, and for that, I will always be thankful.

## DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad, for igniting in me a passion for all artistic forms of expression. Thank you for showing me what love means, and for raising me in poetically.

To my sisters, who collectively show me all spectrums of joy and love. I thank them for trying to listen to me when I talk about “purple,” and for their steadfast encouragement and support, which I desperately needed to complete this.

To my friends and classmates, who I am grateful to learn alongside with. Art is within us, and because of that, true friendship and love will always exist in us as well. Our relationships transcend any and all tangible things - like printed words on paper - so please do not be offended you are not listed here by name; you know who you are.

## INTRODUCTION

### Creatively Critical

I feel there is no way to introduce my thesis without talking about the personal experiences I have had that led me to select this particular topic and format of presentation. A series of seemingly random events that have occurred to me beginning with my first day of school here have led me to believe that the topic of E.E. Cummings' art and aesthetic philosophy has always been a part my destiny, and for that very reason, I will first speak a little on my undergraduate career here at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

On my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, in my sophomore year of college, I was gifted a copy of the Jane Campion film, *Bright Star*, which is a depiction of the love affair between John Keats and his love, Fanny Brawne. I have never read, and only vaguely knew the name of this 19<sup>th</sup> century British Romantic poet, but I became attached. To satisfy my interest, I checked out almost every book about him in Moody Library; my favorite Keats books were the collections of his letters. To read his letters at age 19, written when Keats was only just entering his 20s as well, was to be gifted a best friend from the universe, regardless of geography, culture and even time. Needless to say, I, with encouragement and kind words from Dr. Tom Hanks, switched my major to English that very semester.

Upon switching majors, I enrolled in ENG 3390, titled “From Whitman,” an American Literature survey course that focused on texts written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was taught by a professor who would soon become my advisor: Dr. Luke Ferretter. In this course, I was, by random selection, chosen to present on the works of poet Robinson Jeffers. After Jeffers piqued my interest in modern poetry, we soon were required to read selections from E.E. Cummings’ *100 Selected Poems*. Obviously, this is where that all led to.

“28,” in this particular collection, for lack of a more poetic method of expression, changed my life. It was the first poem I understood viscerally, and even though I had inklings of it with Keats’ correspondence, “28” was the first of which allowed me to finally understand what every poet I’ve read thus far has been trying to communicate. Poets such as T.S. Eliot and Robert Frost, who wrote, “Genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood,” and that “to be a poet is a condition, not a profession,” respectively. Perhaps it is solely for the fact that I read and finally understood, I felt, a poem, and it just happened to be written by E.E. Cummings, or perhaps it was poetic prophecy that brought me to adopt Cummings as my literary hero and soul mate. Either way, my visceral attachment to Cummings was not going to be suppressed.

As I had done with Keats, I went back to Moody Library and maxed out my library card, this time with Cummings. Upon flipping through Milton A. Cohen’s *Poet and Painter*, I landed on a brief quote: ““The artist is not a man who describes but a man who feels,” (73). When reading this book, I was working on a paper for the class that Dr. Ferretter was teaching with my classmate and friend, Courtney Fewell. She, like I did, immediately and viscerally understood what Cummings was trying to capture

through words. My friendship with Courtney is the foundation of this thesis, because Courtney is the one who introduced me to Dr. Emily Setina.

Upon meeting Dr. Setina, I immediately knew that English would be something I would want to further pursue in my future, if only because it would make me a little more like her. She shared with me her experience with her own undergraduate thesis, a creative and critical thesis on the poetry and photography of Marianne Moore. Dr. Setina shared that she critically analyzed each a poem and photograph to make a single chapter, and would end each with an original poem and photograph of her own. This approach not only made the feat of writing a thesis more approachable, but also excited – as opposed to frightened – me.

After doing some more reading about Cummings, I realized how appropriate this format would be for my own topic, as Cummings, a poet, painter, writer of prose, travel diaries, plays, ballets, screenplays, essays and speeches, and even sometime dancer, singer and actor, so primarily focused on the action of creating and expressing oneself through various art forms. He writes in the foreword of his collection of poems *is 5*, “if a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little – somebody who is obsessed by Making.” For both Cummings and myself, it is the process of expressing the inner life – the emotions, thoughts, opinions and ideas of an individual – by external means that allows for humans to truly live and exist as genuinely good, truthful and good people. Poetry calls to attention the most basic of human emotions, and although it may be primitive and animalistic, I think that love can help to transcend any dirty, broken, ugly or mean aspect that also happens to be a part of an honest human experience.

Cummings, who lived during both World Wars, saw a lot of the negative aspects of humanity and existence, and even sought them out. First, he enjoyed spending time in the seedier parts of Boston, keeping company with prostitutes during his undergraduate career at Harvard. In France, during the World War I, he was imprisoned and spent a few months in an internment camp with the international outcasts of the world; he said he had the time of his life. Upon his return to America, Cummings settled down in New York City, and would spend the rest of his life in and out of this city he now claimed as home. Increasingly disgusted with American consumerism and commercialism, Cummings traveled to the Soviet Union to see how individualism could be regulated, and not manipulated. Disillusioned with the stifling society there, Cummings came back to America, and increasingly spent his time at his family estate, Joy Farm.

By dividing Cummings' life into five subsections, mostly influenced by his travels, I hope to highlight the relationship between not only his external and internal selves, but also the one between his life and his art. Each chapter in this thesis, therefore, will be divided into three sections: the first will be a brief biographical summary of a certain period of his life, while the next two will be an explication of a poem, and a critical analysis of one of his paintings, respectively. Each poem portion begins with facsimile of a poem by Cummings, then continues with my explication of that poem, and is followed by an original poem I composed, influenced by Cummings' work. Similarly, the third portion of each chapter will comprise of a painting or drawing by Cummings, my analysis of it, then a painting or drawing of my own.

Perhaps this thesis is not the most polished or most academic piece of work, but I believe that this approach to writing has been the best option for me, since I am not the

most polished or academic human being. What I receive through poetry, and particularly the poetry written by Cummings, is validation. By reading both his works and the works written about him, I learned that I do not have to be the most intellectually intelligent, naturally gifted and talented, most creative, or even a halfway decent student in order to feel as if my life is worth something. By simply expressing myself through an art form, I am able to express my emotions, and create visceral relationships through it. As Cummings wrote, “to feel something is to be alive.” Therefore, this personal approach to analyzing and understanding the works of Cummings is then the most honest depiction of how

Poets, according to the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*, “were called in the earlier epochs of the world legislators or prophets” (Wu 1050). That is, poetry can be prophetic in the sense that all events in life seem to fit together perfectly to produce certain outcomes; it is in these moments, the instances where everything is economically connected and meaningful, that poetry, as visceral sensations and perceptions of beauty, can be experienced. For me, writing this thesis has given me the confidence to assert that my life is poetic: every person I met, every film I watched, every book I was assigned to read in class and every song or artist I have been introduced to since I started my time at Baylor have all contributed something to this thesis. Therefore, I have the utmost confidence that the knowledge I gained through completing this thesis will not only be useful and important, but rather vital and essential to my life as a perpetual student, artist and living human being.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Harvard *1911-1916*

A precocious child, Edward Estlin Cummings, born October 14, 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, spent the majority of his free time reading books and writing short stories or poetry, two activities inspired and encouraged by his parents Edward and Rebecca. Edward, Sr., a sociology professor at Harvard University, instilled a hard work ethic in his son, and taught him the importance of integrity and perseverance. After retiring his professorship at what would later become Cummings' own alma mater, the elder Edward, who named his eldest after a close colleague and neighbor of his, became a Unitarian minister, and would eventually preside over the largest Unitarian church in Cambridge. Cummings' parents, both aware of the special sensitivity and imagination of Estlin as a child, encouraged and supported his interests in the arts throughout his life. In this environment Cummings was able to perceive education as fun; he would effortlessly excel in his studies as both a child and teenager, because he enjoyed school for the sake of learning, and not to simply receive an education.

In fact, Cummings was still very much a teenager when he began college; His adept ability to process new information quickly allowed him to enter Harvard University at the young age of 17. Although he performed well in his undergraduate career – he was the only member of his graduating class to graduate magna cum laude with honors in three separate departments (English, Greek and Literature) - Cummings by no means was a star student. He often rebelled against assignments and professors he did not enjoy, or

did not add to his increasingly sophisticated understanding of poetry and painting. When he disliked an assignment, he would simply not do it, or would submit a satirized essay on a related subject pertaining to why he does not approve of the assignment prompt.

Although he received many high marks, he had no shortage of Cs, Ds or even Fs. The ease of his previous study habits made it difficult for Cummings to understand why he had to adopt his style of learning, “Cummings had a creative personality, and disciplined intellectual analysis was not to his liking,” (Kennedy 53). Cummings, in one of many little blue exam booklets he utilized as a student at Harvard, wrote out short vague answer responses in an hour-long exam to prompts regarding texts concerning Richard II and Richard III, on which he received a “C” mark. On the inside of the back cover of the blue book, Cummings writes an explanation for his poor performance:

“P.S. –

I am sorry that my sickness caused me to hurry somewhat in my review for this course, [over] which, however, I spent all possible time under the circumstances. I should like to have done myself justice in several places where I was unable to for this reason.

As I was absent [3] weeks during which the records [of] read; were received, I desire to state that I have read for this course Richard II(&III).” (Cummings)

However, it is more likely that Cummings, instead of being sick, was either cavorting throughout Boston with his new friends found through the poetry society, the *Harvard Monthly* during his senior year of undergraduate studies, or voraciously reading volumes of poetry in the campus libraries; a habit he picked up his freshman year at the university because he was too shy and introverted to spend his free time otherwise.

Cummings spent the majority of his first two years of undergraduate studies in the library or writing poetry, but none of the material he produced during these years would be valuable to Cummings in terms of being representational works of the artist. Instead,

“the big change during his freshman year came with the discovery of Keats, and when the leisure of summer arrived, Cummings began to study the poems closely” (Kennedy 75).

During this summer, Cummings read Keats extensively and actively, taking detailed notes about the form and style of the Romantic poet’s writing in a personal journal. Notes taken on July 10 indicate that Cummings was greatly affected by the repetition of the vowel sounds in Keats’ *Lamia*, which he realized drew parallels between the content of the poem with the form of the poem, so that the two could, together, create a viscerally pleasant work of literary art. Keats’ attention to the auditory experience of the reader inspired Cummings to regularly focus on each of the human senses, as poetry was to both poets an entirely encompassing and human experience. Keats’ philosophy had a great impact on the young impressionable Cummings. Keats’ words regarding aesthetics and visceral emotion would go on to be the foundation of Cummings’ own aesthetic philosophy: “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections, and the truth of Imagination.” (Norman 39). It is through poetry, then, that Cummings would choose to express his opinion about Keats, in a poem entitled, “Fame Speaks.”

Inspired by his freshman Greek instructor, Theodore “Dory” Miller, a graduate student only seven years Cummings’ senior, Cummings would start to take poetry-writing as a serious profession, rather than just an extracurricular activity. Dory, who became an older brother figure and mentor for Cummings, would inspire Cummings to break out of his studious library habit, and venture out into the rest of the campus. It certainly helped Cummings to branch out and meet new people when he joined various literary groups on campus. His association with the *Harvard Monthly* poetry publication,

in tandem with his being selected to live in Thayer Hall in the exclusive Harvard Yard on campus (Kennedy 85). These circumstances introduced to him countless friends who would remain in Cummings' inner circle for the rest of his life: James Sibley Watson (who would keep Cummings housed, fed and clothed throughout his entire life, and was Cummings' closest friend), John Dos Passos (who would serve as Cummings' best man in his marriage to Anne Barton), and especially Scofield Thayer, who paid Cummings a thousand dollars (equivalent to \$100,000 now) for a brief poem Cummings wrote for his wedding to Elaine Orr.

Thayer, who later suffered from paranoid schizophrenia in his mid-thirties, was the best friend Cummings could ask for, especially during their time together at Harvard. Cummings and Thayer, who was considerably wealthy following the untimely death of his father, shared similar goals in life. Thayer had "hoped to use his money in the world of publishing in order to make an impact upon the aesthetic values of the American public" (Kennedy 80). Thayer, who shared an equally voracious passion for modernism and "New Art," as Cummings would later speak about at his commencement ceremony at Harvard, was responsible for not only introducing Cummings to various books and artists that so excited and influenced him and his work, but for also partaking in crazy adventures to Boston together. Thayer was such the good friend to Cummings that when Cummings had an affair with his new bride and impregnated her, Thayer stepped in to assume responsibility for the child, Nancy. There was never a fight or even so much as a harsh word exchanged between these two; their friendship rooted in mutual aesthetic appreciation and visceral connectedness truly did allow them to transcend any difficulty in their relationship.

### III

#### FAME SPEAKS

Stand forth, John Keats! On earth thou knew'st me not;  
Steadfast through all the storms of passion, thou,  
True to thy muse, and virgin to thy vow;  
Resigned, if name with ashes were forgot,  
So thou one arrow in the gold had'st shot!  
I never placed my laurel on thy brow,  
But on thy name I come to lay it now,  
When thy bones wither in the earthly plot.  
Fame is my name. I dwell among the clouds,  
Being immortal, and the wreath I bring  
Itself is Immortality. The sweets  
Of earth I know not, more the pains, but wing  
In mine own ether, with the crownéd crowds  
Born of the centuries.—Stand forth, John Keats!

*Poetry*  
*“Fame Speaks”*

Cummings directly addresses the subject of his ode, “Fame Speaks,” in the first sentence of his poem with the first four words being, “Stand forth,John Keats!” With this declaration, highlighted with an exclamation point, Cummings boldly and confidently summons the subject of his poem into action. By beginning this poem with a command, Cummings immediately draws attention to action, therefore creating a tone of excitement and strength; the confidence that comes through these four words, tied together with a single comma, allows for a sense of immediacy and urgency to come through. The effect of this, in addition to the usage of the first-person narrative, is a call to attention of the visceral relationship Cummings feels he has with Keats, despite the omission of more normative and pragmatic bases of human connection.

Although the poem, as a slight variation on a Spencerian sonnet, may be one of Cummings’ more conventional and formally constructed literary works, his trademark unique style exists with the punctuation used throughout, and unusual spacing between the words in lines 1, 9 and 11. His omission of spaces after the use of a punctuation mark within the interior of a sentence allows for the contrast between these non-spaces and the wide gaps between words to stand out even more. These three lines, highlighted with large amounts of negative space between the words, therefore, draw attention to the phrases that are set apart from the others. In the first line, it is the “Stand forth,John Keats!” that is tied with the other two lines, which are “Fame is my name,” and “Itself is Immortality,” respectively. The terseness of these phrases, coupled with the fact that they are immediately drawn out by the human eye upon first sight, before they are singled out

for content, reflect Cummings' own aesthetic philosophy, as influenced by the subject of his ode, John Keats.

When read closely, however, the spaces indicate that one sentence in particular is broken off from the others: "I dwell among the clouds, 'Being immortal, and the wreath I bring/Itself is immortality," (9-11). This sentence, just as the first does, emphasizes Cummings' belief that Keats' fame is immortal, and therefore is omniscient. Through Keats' poetry, Keats provides immortality not only for himself, but for Cummings as well; the fame Keats obtains through his works transcends pragmatic human logic so that other human beings may feel the visceral feelings he felt and expressed in his work. In this way, the values and emotions communicated across space and time remain universal, and therefore, immortal.

The Spenserian sonnet, which typically follows a rhyme scheme of abba/abba/cde/cde, indicates that Cummings particularly felt a need to highlight the form of the poem as a device in showing his knowledge of traditional poetic forms and techniques. That is, Spenserian sonnets, as compared to other sonnet forms, are known to require a relatively higher level of skill and thought on the part of the poet, due to the restricting amount of rhyming words that can be utilized. In this particular poem, Cummings changes the Spenserian sonnet to highlight the first two lines of the second and last triplet, by inverting the cde rhyme pattern to dce, thereby interjecting a more modern flare on this sonnet, by deviating away from the traditional form as a whole, while simultaneously highlighting these lines. Both quatrains end with the end of a sentence, while the first triplet does not end, but rather is interrupted by the first two words of the second to last sentence, "The sweets."

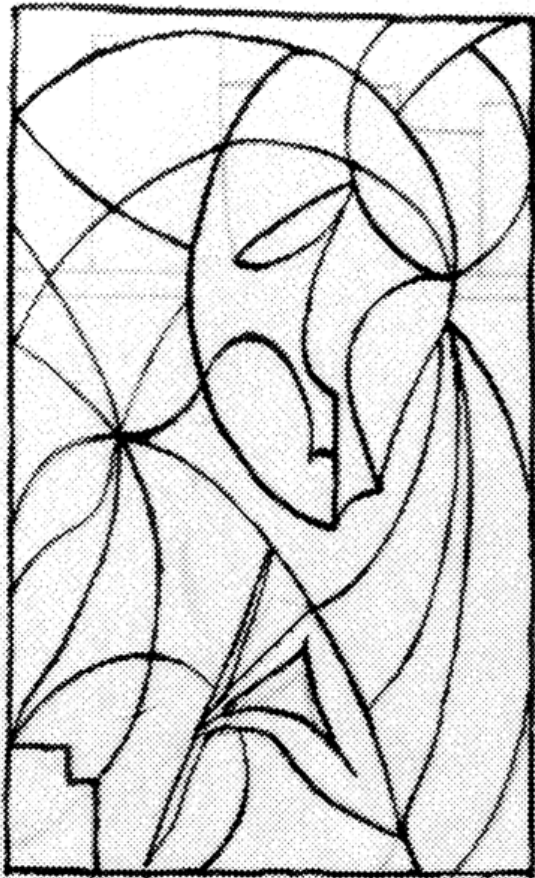
The inversion of the two lines therefore brings to attention, the fact that Cummings states, “The sweets/Of earth I know not,more the pains,” thereby associating the inverse form of the poem with the effect Keats had on Cummings, in allowing Cummings to solidify his philosophy in the supernatural and intangible. The disparity between the “sweets” and the “pains” as illustrated in these lines reflect also the disparity Cummings finds between life on earth and his fame and a form of immortalization, as depicted in the second quatrain (8-12).

Cummings explicitly ends the poem in a cyclical manner with a repetition of the first sentence of the poem, as a way of exhibiting his steadfast and zealous adoration of Keats. By beginning and ending the poem with the same four words, both with the exclamation at the end to express the passion and dedication he has for his opinion on Keats, Cummings showcases the fact that even with all the intellectual scrutiny and examination of Keats, his connection with the poet of a different time is visceral, but nonetheless real. Through this poem, Cummings proves that his visceral connection to Keats, especially after reading about Keats’ own philosophical ideals about “negative capability,” as previously mentioned, is not affected, in the end, by any pragmatic means such as time or space. In this way, Cummings highlights the superiority of visceral emotion to intellect, and praises the way it can bring people, even from very different times and walks of life, together.

“Coco”



“Scofield Thayer: Oct-‘15”



Scofield Thayer  
Oct-15

Cummings, E.E. *Scofield Thayer: Oct- '15*. 1915. Ink on paper. 5 x 9 in. Harvard University, Cambridge.

*Painting*  
*“Scofield Thayer: Oct- ‘15”*

In his line drawing of Scofield Thayer, Cummings employs a simplistic yet modern approach to execute a portrait of one of his closest friends. Undoubtedly influenced by the numerous amounts of Picasso works he viewed in the museums he frequently visited in Boston, Cummings placed emphasis on the relationship between positive and negative space. That is, the use of positive space – in this case, thin, monochromatic and unvarying black lines – to counteract the negative white space, which works together to highlight the idiosyncratic features of his friend’s face and style of dress. With no variation in color or line width, Cummings places emphasis on the geometric relationship between the lines and the empty spaces between them to create an abstract depiction of Thayer. Thayer, who, like Cummings, was heavily interested in modernism, is an appropriate subject for such an abstract and experimental portrait. Thayer was a frequent subject for Cummings, whether because he liked to sit as a model, or just so felt inclined to help his friend with his passion and hobby is up for debate.

The portrait is highly stylized, and the lack of any other extra adornment in the form of color or other media indicates that Cummings wanted to highlight his style with geometric pattern embedded within the black border. The face is discernable amongst the other geometric shapes, because of the large oval shape Cummings creates in the upper right hand side. The face, as one of two main focal points, is located diagonally across from two other smaller focal points: a slim hand holding a pen. The two of these, surrounded by rounded triangular shapes, are smaller in size, and therefore draw the

reader's eye to them. A smaller and not so obvious focal point lies between the fact and hand, where a total of nine lines meet to make a point. This, as on the opposite side of Thayer's face, balances not only the fact and hand, but the second gathering of lines, which is smaller, but still noticeable. Five lines that lead up to the face intersect another vertical line, smaller and singular, but not a continuation of any of the other lines below it. This moves the eye upward and to the left, in a counter-clockwise direction, allowing the face to be the first focal point, then the point, then the hand. The viewer then will perceive the subject, Thayer, first as a human being, then second, as a writer or artist of some sort.

Through various visual means, Cummings manages to both show of his experimental styling of abstract modernism and cubism, and produce a symbolic representation of how he perceives his friend. The style not only shows both of their mutual interest in modernism, but reflects the relationship they had with each other outside of their shared passion. That is, through this image, Cummings is able to show that his friendship with Thayer is that of intimate friendship, not of any other agenda, because their mutual interest is primarily in the arts. By sharing similar passions, both Cummings and Thayer were able to express to each other visceral emotions, thereby becoming true friends.

As both Cummings and Thayer were both avid admirers of the modernist movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is important to look into the style of the portrait in harmony with the subject in it: to draw Thayer as the protagonist of an abstract portrait similar to the ones they viewed and so admired together was the biggest gesture of expressing Cummings' earnest admiration for his companion. Pablo Picasso, who

undoubtedly was a favorite artist of both Cummings and Thayer, would influence Cummings not only in his painting, but in shaping his artistic philosophy as well. In describing the intentions Picasso had behind his movement toward cubism, one could easily perceive these words to be about Cummings' art as well:

“We find not objective reality geometrized for geometrization's sake, but rather a desire to lend adequate expression to the artist's subjective truth concerning the primary and most profound essentials of the human world.” (Abrams 58)

To portray Thayer in a minimalistic style is to highlight the intrinsic values Cummings admired his friend for. The highlighting of his face, as an innate part of who Thayer was, in addition to his hand and pen, which Cummings and Thayer believed were an innate passion they both shared, presents an honest and personal depiction of an individual from the viewpoint of an intimate friend. Through one simple line drawing, viewers are able to understand not only who Scofield Thayer and E.E. Cummings were, but also comprehend the type of intimate friendship they had with each other.

Cummings, in his literary ode to Keats and this visual ode to an esteemed friend, employs artistic styles borrowed from individuals who influenced and inspired him to pursue further his passion for understanding and mastering artistic forms. Through his experimentation of different styles and art forms during this time at Harvard, Cummings was able to create a foundational base for his aesthetic philosophy that he would then continue to develop and mold into his own style for expressing his original ideas for the rest of his life.

“The Purplue Connection”



Hwang, Hannah. *The Purplue Connection*. 2013. Ink on paper. 10 x 15 in.

## CHAPTER TWO

France  
*1917*

Cummings, disillusioned with his post-graduate “publishing” job in New York, which turned out to be nothing more than mailing out letters and delivering copies of books, yearned for adventure and meaning for his life following his graduation from Harvard. What he hoped would be glamorous and empowering would be oppressive and stifling; Cummings found himself feeling nostalgic for the life he had in Cambridge, surrounded by literature, art and his friends. In his downtime, he would draw a lot, and in the times at work when he could work uninterrupted, and without any negative consequences, he would work on his poetry. However, neither of these hobbies would take his mind off the fact that an office job was suffocating and bland. He found the perfect opportunity to escape his boredom in an unfortunate turn of events in world politics: on April 7, 1917, a day after the United States of America declared war on Germany, Cummings, an ardent pacifist – a trait he no doubt inherited from his religious father – volunteered as a member of the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service, a unit of the Red Cross that specifically provided aid to the French. Only a mere eleven days later, Cummings would ship out overseas to Paris to officially join World War I.

On the way to France, Cummings would run into an old childhood neighbor, Slater Brown, who was two years his junior. A recent graduate of Columbia University for English, Slater would later write high praise of Cummings’ first volume of poetry,

*Tulips & Chimneys*, in a review for *Broom* magazine. Brown wrote of Cummings' work that his poems' "beauty is that of all swift things at rest," (Rotella 39). He continues on to defend Cummings against his critics, writing that the only reason why they dislike his work is because they do not "like to be knocked down," and that the speed with which Cummings expresses himself, or as Brown describes, the "exhilarating experience [of] the sharp, the living, the swift, the brilliant tempos of E.E. Cummings."

Brown's critical literary opinion certainly was tinged with a little bias for Cummings, as Cummings was literally responsible for saving Brown's life when they were France together. The two experienced a shocking three months together as detainees of a French labor camp, when Brown, a vocal anti-war pacifist, wrote politically charged letters to his family and friends back home, thereby incriminating himself as a traitor to the very French he was trying to help. Cummings, knowing that Brown had a better chance of being released from prison if he went along with him, took Brown's side, and joined him. The two would spend September through December of that year together in the internment camp, where Cummings wrote to his mother back in the United States that he was having the time of his life. Their time there was more or less exactly what the middle-class suburbanite Cummings had been searching for his whole life. Rather than feeling afraid or angry with his current situation, he was unexpectedly quite pleased with the new experiences he was having: "Thus they felt a paradoxical relief in having escaped from the enmity and harassment of their compatriots into the hearty friendliness of a society of international outcasts," (Kennedy 150). Cummings, as an individual, would grow to learn a lot about himself in solitary reflection, and would learn to prefer his own company for the rest of his life.

In fact, once Cummings and Brown were released, and Cummings was back living in Paris following the war, “Living alone and seeing friends only sporadically, Cummings had ample time to ponder aesthetics,” (Cohen 21). With all of his alone time away from his family, Cummings spent the majority of the remaining months walking around Paris, observing the locals, and celebrating his newfound freedom. His observations manifested themselves into copious amounts of notes both drawn and written, including but not limited to pencil sketches and detailed diagrams, and original quotes and short phrases. His visual studies allowed Cummings to exercise various experimental artistic methods, and his style, although heavily influenced by the leading modernists of the time period such as Picasso and Cezanne, became entirely his own. The works produced during this period reflect the unearthing of the forward-thinking individual Cummings was to be for the rest of his life.

#### IV

little ladies more  
than dead exactly dance  
in my head,precisely  
dance where danced la guerre.

Mimi à  
la voix fragile  
qui chatouille Des  
Italiens

the putain with the ivory throat  
Marie Louise Lallemand  
n'est-ce pas que je suis belle  
chéri? les anglais m'aiment  
tous,les américains  
aussi...."bon dos,bon cul de Paris"(Marie  
Vierge  
Priez  
Pour  
Nous)

with the  
long lips of  
Lucienne which dangle  
the old men and hot  
men se promènent  
doucement le soir(ladies

accurately dead les anglais  
sont gentils et les américains  
aussi,ils payent bien les américains dance

exactly in my brain voulea-  
vous coucher avec  
moi? Non? pourquoi?)

ladies skilfully  
dead precisely dance  
where has danced la  
guerre j'm'appelle  
Manon, cinq rue Henri Monnier  
voulez-vous coucher avec moi?  
te ferai Mimi  
te ferai Minette,  
dead exactly dance  
si vous voulez  
chatouiller  
mon lézard ladies suddenly  
j'm'en fous des nègres

(in the twilight of Paris

Marie Louise with queenly  
legs cinq rue Henri  
Monnier a little love  
begs, Mimi with the body  
like une boîte à joujoux, want nice sleep?  
toutes les petites femmes exactes  
qui dansent toujours in my  
head dis-donc, Paris

ta gorge mystérieuse  
pourquoi se promène-t-elle, pourquoi  
éclate ta voix  
fragile couleur de pivoine?)

with the

long lips of Lucienne which  
dangle the old men and hot men  
precisely dance in my head  
ladies carefully dead

~~~~~

*Poetry*  
*“IV: little ladies more”*

The fourth poem in Cummings' *Tulips and Chimneys*, which is a rare two-page work, includes both English and French. Cummings, who grew up speaking the language in his home, and therefore was fluent in it from a young age, employs French in this poem as a means to communicate the alienation and detachment he felt during his time in Paris. Although he spoke the language, and was able to In fact, the majority of the poem is in French, broken up into colloquial phrases emphasizing vulgar language, to depict Cummings' relationship with various prostitutes. The rebellion he felt against his traditional upbringing is showcased here, as he writes about the intimate encounters he had with the women of the night. Just as he fraternized with them in Cambridge, as a means of rebelling against the values instilled in him by his father, Cummings was keen on spending time with these outsiders of society. However, as he was afraid to do so in Boston as a university student, Cummings lost fear of judgment and punishment from his father, although the fear of contracting venereal disease was just as high, and finally did what he had always dreamt about doing thus far. The loss of innocence in his first encounters with these women are depicted in these lines.

The first and last stanzas are both written almost entirely in English, and both consist of four lines. The exception lies in the last line of the first stanza, which ends with “la guerre,” meaning “the war.” Within these two stanzas, there is only one word capitalized, which is “Lucienne” in the first line of the last stanza, which is also in French. There are repeating phrases and stylistic elements in these two stanzas, including the alliteration of words that begin with the letter “L” and the emphasis on their relationship with the word “dead.” “Dead,” in the first stanza, is highlighted in the stanza

through both alliteration with the repetition of the word “dance,” and rhyme, when it is rhymed with “head.” Similarly, “dead” is again highlighted in the last stanza through alliteration, and the fact that it is the very last word of the poem indicates that the state of being dead is the main emotion and state of being Cummings focuses on in the poem. The placement of English at the beginning and end allows for the poem to come full circle, implying that although Cummings tries to make sense of such experiences, there is never any real resolution; these events will happen time and time again.

The stanzas in between vary quite a bit, in stanza and line length, use of punctuation and capitalization, indentation and vocabulary. The stanzas do get a bit longer as the poem continues, which follows the natural human tendency to make quick observations and perceptions, and the judgment that follows. The first half of the poem, printed on the left side, ends in a series of questions, with the ending ellipsis. With this, the reader immediately feels inclined to find the beginning ellipsis, and upon finding it in the middle of the text, hidden between words, as there is no space to emphasize the beginning of the sub-thought.

The next stanza, the longest in the poem, depicts dialogue that takes place between the speaker, presumably Cummings himself, and the women who he pays to entertain him. He writes the dialogue in French to make it confusing for his American readers, and it is this sense of unobtainability and mysteriousness that mirrors both Cummings’ sense of self and alienation as a foreigner abroad, and his loss of innocence and ignorance to another aspect of human life as an adult. The length of this stanza adds to the confusion that takes place in the dialogue between female prostitutes and male customers; the interweaving of English and French make it difficult to fully understand

what is happening. In this way, the mix of the two different languages makes the exchange more truthful, as well as humorous. Cummings indirectly criticizes the conversation by making light of it; however, the realism involved within the stanza reflects that Cummings both knows how these conversations go because he probably had a few himself, and also, that these relationships are extremely vacuous. This poem is Cummings' self-effacing method of simultaneously criticizing himself and having pity for himself and his loneliness.

As his first time abroad, Cummings' subsequent visits to France, both during and after the first World War, allowed for him to break free of all ties to his adolescence. His newfound freedom was exercised through a sort of experimentation he had only practiced in his artistic hobbies; his time in the internment camp and alone in the big metropolis of Paris gave Cummings the independent freedom he always sought to exercise. Rather than spending time in the company of the outcasts of society, Cummings now was one of them. In his isolation, Cummings gained confidence in his own identity, and the moral battle he won in not only saving his friend from prison, but also in maintaining his sanity during such turbulent times would prove his innate identity as worthy, good and unique, no matter how lonely and disillusioned he became. The art he practiced in this time reflect the fearlessness Cummings discovered in himself and fostered as a permanent aspect of his personality and aesthetic philosophy.

“konglish”

the city planning in  
pyeongtaek is excellent

an everything mah-t  
next to  
ee sang han dae  
with  
ee buhn  
but  
moo suh wuh  
yuh jah duhl  
and  
puppy palaces

but best of all  
the black bean noodles  
are in between  
hobak nite  
and  
the latest Marvel flick

“Dapper Frenchman”



Cummings, E.E. *Dapper Frenchman*. Undated. 8 x 12.5 in., Ken Lopez, Hadley.

*Painting*  
*“Dapper Frenchman”*

Initially created as a mixture of soot or charcoal and water, ink was invented as a method of easy and cheap artistic expression, because of the fact that this medium is so soluble. Because of the singular color, shadows and highlights predominantly allow the image to be both visible and representative; the different shades of black and gray create depth by the simplest means. Ink as an artistic medium requires careful planning and considerable forethought on the part of the artist; this does not do well to express spontaneous and extemporaneous planning, despite the characteristics of the medium itself. Similar to watercolor, ink is used by mixing the pigment with varying amounts of water, so that the value of the color would be The way that the object being represented in the picture reacts to light that determines in the image what it is, rather than illustrating the object for itself.

In Cummings' undated ink wash portrait, “Dapper Frenchman,” he uses a light ink wash in the background to highlight the lightness of the figure's face, thereby also emphasizing the dark of the Frenchman's moustache. There are four major dark areas in the painting: the hair, mustache, tie and the wash on the left side of the drawing, to highlight the lightness and smoothness of his face. The placement of the mustache in the 8” x 12.5” portrait also adds to the fact that Cummings wanted to highlight the decorative elements of this man's dress. The formality of his appearance, and the fastidious grooming, show that along with sketching various people as a practice for representational experiments, Cummings was unable to not bring in some of his own

personality to his work. The title of the work itself reveals a certain trait of Cummings himself, in that he kept or chose specific company during his time in France.

The use of negative space allows for the portrait to be less over-whelming than had Cummings chosen to fill in the rest of the figure's clothing. Instead, the focus on only the tie, collar and jacket lapel, is all that Cummings needs to represent in order for the audience to realize that the male's face and clothing are the main focus of the image, and nothing else. The figure in the portrait is youthful and well-dressed, but the steady eye contact he maintains with the viewer, the first being the artist, Cummings himself, indicates youth as an age, and not as a character trait. The unevenly shaped eyes adds to the mysterious state of the figure, as the focus on the figure's right eye on the portrait seems to be unaffected by being drawn, as if he is amused by the attention he is receiving as a model.

Characterized as "dapper" by Cummings himself, this male figure, neat and fastidious in his appearance, most likely was someone who caught Cummings' eye as an observer of the general public. The term "Frenchman" alludes to the fact that his figure is most likely a stereotypical representation of one of many "dapper Frenchmen" Cummings encountered in his time abroad. Cummings often traveled alone during his time in France, so it would be most likely that he would either have asked someone he didn't know on an intimate level for this portrait, or that it was created by recollection of a certain individual he had met on the street that day.

The simplicity in color allows for the complexity of the human male figure and his facial expression in the portrait to be the main focus of this work of art. Because of the lack of focus on variation on color or mediums, the process of adding each shade,

layer by layer, can be seen, therefore indicating that Cummings worked hard to express each detail subtly and accurately. This is parallel with the observations Cummings made of life the complexities of youth, war and artistic identity in Paris, as compared to observations he made about the American sheltered society he grew up in.

This painting is an example of how Cummings started to compare his own experiences in America with the world, and how he started to judge American culture in comparison to other cultures. While in France, although he was finally allowed the freedoms to pursue any artistic endeavor he wanted, his writing and drawing were not enough to satisfy him. In fact, his independence and isolation kept him from completely feeling fulfilled: “he was lonely, often on the verge of depression, and bored,” (Sawyer-Laucanno 144). Cummings would soon fly back home to try and make a more permanent home for himself in the city he prematurely left, New York City.

“Serious Dreamer”



Hwang, Hannah. *Serious Thinker*. 2013. Watercolor on paper. 15 x 20 in.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 4 Patchin Place *1923-1962*

Located in Greenwich Village, in the Manhattan borough of New York City, Cummings' apartment complex, shaped like a cul-de-sac, served as a sort of artists' utopia. Neighbors in this "Patchin Place" included other artists, writers and poets, and became a safe haven for the individuals who valued their privacy and work, while still wanting to be a part of the "bohemia" scene that was fostering in the city. For Cummings, this home, in which he moved in 1924, and would stay until the year of his death in 1962, would be the most permanent place of residence for the artist throughout his life time. In New York City, Cummings would actively keep up a schedule of creating art, exhibiting it, seeing art, and meeting with other artists. In fact, Cummings experimented in other art forms, including writing plays and musicals, dancing, singing, acting, and was even considering moving to Hollywood for a limited amount of time to work on a screenplay, as many other famous authors at the time were doing (Ernest Hemingway serves as one such example) (Reef 98). Cummings spent the majority of his day sketching, writing and visiting with friends; his work was his life, and his friends were his colleagues.

Many important and influential artists would visit Cummings in either his apartment or nearby, in the ethnic-food restaurants he so loved and frequently visited. The Irish poet Dylan Thomas would stop by 4 Patchin Place during his own visit to New York. Thomas, among Cummings' other friends, who would either visit or keep up a relationship through correspondence, would continually be a source of inspiration and

encouragement for the rest of Cummings' life. Cummings drew and wrote so frequently that in the year 1931, he published two books. One was entirely devoted to his visual art, a collected titled *CIOPW*, an acronym for the various mediums he used to create the works inside it: Charcoal, Ink, Oil [Paint], Pencil and Watercolor. The other was his most experimental collection of poetry since his *Tulips and Chimneys*, a book called *W*, that was also called *ViVa*. His friends would help him with all other aspects of his life as well.

In a letter to his friend and fellow poet, Robert Frost, Cummings wrote when faced with the possibility of eviction from his New York City home in 1960, that to him, 4 Patchin Place was the "...the only urban spot I can work... The fact that am threatened(And How)plus the fact that I can(& do)work, is all I want you to know," (Sawyer-Laucanno 535), and the fact that the owner, Hugh Keenan, was displeased with the low amount of rent he was receiving in return, only added to the frustrations with money Cummings had himself. With this issue, his friends stepped in to help. Cummings would continue to pay his rent and eat meals paid for by his loyal friends, who took turns lending or gifting Cummings money. Sometimes they would even submit his name into scholarship and grant funds, so that Cummings would be receiving money for himself through his own work, even if it was not through his own initiative. When his friends were unable to help, Cummings received money from his mother, Rebecca, who still lived in his childhood home in Cambridge.

However, Cummings would never give up his home in New York City for an absence of such a petty thing as money, even though sometimes he would joke about the matter. He, to a friend, "Rascoe," spoke of his existence as a typical "starving artist:"

"I am a poet, true enough; but what right have I to be proud of my disease? It's such a shabby, idiotic disease. You know what I want? Money, comfort, love,

ease, luxury, the price in my pocket for theatre tickets and good wine. What do I do to go about getting them? I sit up in a shabby room, shivering with the cold, and use my imagination to keep me warm, thinking about the South Sea Islands and the tropical swamps. Your plumber wouldn't do that. He has more sense. He would go out and get some coal and wood to make a fire. He wouldn't sit there and freeze and try to imagine he was warm. I make poems because it is the thing I know how to do best. In fact, it is about the only thing I know how to do.” (Norman 191)

Cummings would rather be himself, a poet, than compromise any aspect of his innate being and ability to lead a more comfortable lifestyle. The justification in testimony for his being a poet reflects that his parents were right when they first caught a glimpse of Cummings' personality as a child growing up in the Cambridge-Harvard bubble: Cummings was born to be an artist.

To create art, as the foremost and most important item on Cummings' daily agenda, meant that Cummings was busy finding inspiration from all different types of sources. Everyday views, such as the view from his third floor studio window in 4 Patchin Place, as depicted in his “rooftops: new york,” reflect this ever-present artistic hunger Cummings harbored. With such an voracious appetite to create and transform external objects, and elevate them into meaningful artworks, Cummings was constantly surrounded by new and exciting objects to examine and admire. The poem “XLV” in his *ViVa* that begins with the three lines “you/in win/ter who sit...,” shows just how closely Cummings scrutinized and analyzed the world around him. The juxtaposition of these two works, one seemingly spontaneous and carefree, while the other, incredibly complex and well-organized, show just how experimental and artistic Cummings was during his time as a resident of 4 Patchin Place.

## XLV

you  
in win  
ter who sit  
dying thinking  
huddled behind dir  
ty glass mind muddled  
and cuddled by dreams(or some  
times vacantly gazing through un  
washed panes into a crisp todo of  
murdering uncouth faces which pass rap  
idly with their breaths.)“people are walking deaths  
in this season” think “finality lives up  
on them a little more openly than usual  
hither,thither who briskly busily carry the as  
tonishing & spontaneous & difficult ugliness  
of themselves with a more incisive simplicity a  
more intensively brutal futility”And sit  
huddling dumbly behind three or two partly tran  
sparent panes which by some loveless trick sepa  
rate one stilled unmoving mind from a hun  
dred doomed hurrying brains(by twos  
or threes which fiercely rapidly  
pass with their breaths)in win  
ter you think,die slow  
ly “toc tic” as i  
have seen trees(in  
whose black bod  
ies leaves  
hide

*Poetry*  
*“XLV: you in winter”*

The pseudo-diamond shape of this poem immediately reminds the reader of Cummings' occupation as a "poet-painter." In this poem, he combines visual aids along with the more conventional conventions of poetic form and style to create a literary work that appeals to both the auditory and visual senses. Originally published in the 1931 collection, *W, or ViVa*, this poem serves well to symbolize the philosophy of the book itself. *ViVa* contains 70 poems total: every seventh poem is a sonnet, and the last seven are all sonnets, highlighting the parallel of the total number of sonnets with the total number of lines that characterize a sonnet (both 14) (Sawyer-Laucanno 334). There was no lack of such detail and depth of thought anywhere through this collection.

With a total of 29 lines, the central line, line 15, "tonishing & spontaneous & difficult ugliness," contains the most syllables, at the parallel number of 15. From either side of this line, the number of syllables drops by one, as the poem moves outward. The first and last line of the poem, "you," and "hide," respectively, are then paired together for their auditory likeness. The effect of the meter of the poem requires that the poem be re-read, as poem becomes more difficult to read as it rapidly approaches the fat and word-dense center. The opening ellipsis at the end of the poem, in line 26 "have seen trees(in" reiterates this fact. Cummings' command for the reader to reread the poem is a clever way of drawing parallels between the form of the poem with its content.

The phrase "'toc tic'" (25) indicates the negation of time, which pairs nicely with its counterpart, the fifth line from the top: "huddled behind dir," because the two reflect Cummings' belief that individuals who focus solely on intellectual matters (the line

above reads “dying thinking” marrying those two present-tense verbs together) are not truly living. The twin mention of winter at either side of the poem drives home the idea, as winter is the season of stagnation and death. An allusion to dirty mirrors and unclear reflections are also mentioned twice in this poem, and the more you re-read the poem, the more pairs of imagery or phrases you find. In this, Cummings highlights the superfluous nature of intellect without its application to art or visceral emotion, as intellect will only yield intellect, rather than producing anything new.

This ideal is reflected in the horizontal form of the poem as well, because although the left side is perfectly lined up to create a clean, streamlined form, the right side is a mess of jagged and unevenly spaced lines. The pragmatism of the form on the left in addition to the mathematical soundness used in the meter that occurs within the poem does not do well to create one cohesive poem; the visual aspect lacks where the auditory excels, and vice versa. Cummings reveals that without visceral and artistic ambition, the pursuit of intellect will lead you nowhere. Cummings was never guilty of doing this, and so as a living human who preferred Spring over Winter, advocated for others to move past singular intellect, and feel the joy, peace and love that comes with visceral sensation, as expressed in his later poem, “LI” from his *I X I [One Times One]*:

“sweet spring is your  
time is my time is our  
time for springtime is lovetime  
and viva sweet love”  
(Firmage 591)

“SLP”

x x x

always late

sad girls Club

silver lines

real danCing

“north Country”

we all hurt

Cry Car Care

o0O

“rooftops:new york”



Cummings, E.E. *rooftops:new york*. Undated. Pencil and crayon on paper. 8 x 11.5 in.

*Painting*  
*“rooftops:new york”*

In Cummings’ undated work, “rooftops: new york,” he has drawn in pencil a scenery of several buildings and ladders unique to the urban landscape of New York City. A resident of New York City for the majority of his life, this was not an uncommon sight for the artist who preferred the busy city as his home for 38 years. By having the urban landscape drawn on a horizontal orientation, Cummings pays homage to the traditional thought that landscapes should encompass the subject matter in a way that such depicts nature as sprawling and endlessly vast. Cummings plays off the idea that an urban landscape should also be depicted as a landscape; to Cummings, this was the view of nature, or of real life, that he saw on an almost-daily basis. However, the use of the large square of negative, empty space on the left side of the 8.5” by 11” paper sketch indicates that Cummings rebels against both tradition and nature as historically depicted. The unbalance of the picture also adds to this fact that Cummings, even in his sketches, paid attention to the detail, meaning and implications of all aspects of an art form.

The lines, drawn primarily in thick-leaded pencil, fail to represent the planes of the buildings that Cummings saw from his room in Patchin Place in a realistic light. The lines are not all of the same width, and do not adhere to more traditional and geometric rules to showcase the fact that ladders and buildings are very much based mathematic and pragmatic foundations. Rather, due to their jagged and unrefined nature, Cummings again employs speed and intensity to showcase a genuine and impassioned nature to express the relationship he had between seeing and perceiving, with emoting. That is, the relationship between his intellect and his body reflected itself in the art that he produced; the little

amount of time to judge and “perfect” things gave way to the raw perception of the view out of Cummings’ window, allowing this image to be more intimate and personal.

The coloring of the image also adds to this quick and visceral personality of the drawing, as the messy blocks of color, filled in with crayon, indicate an abruptness or carelessness about the technique of the drawing. In this way, the content of the drawing is emphasized, rather than the technique, and the buildings are depicted as significant for no other reason than the fact that it was the object of scrutiny for an individual. In this humble point of view, the sketch is able to transcend itself from a seemingly random and ordinary image to an intimate opening into the quiet and private life of Cummings. His third floor studio was notoriously off-limits, so by being able to share with Cummings a quick and private view of the sprawling metropolitan city, the viewer is able to catch a glimpse of the natural and primitive beginnings of Cummings’ artistic process.

As previously mentioned, the juxtaposition between the intensely detailed organization within the poetry printed in Cummings’ *ViVa*, and the lighthearted sketches of his home city reveal the scope of Cummings’ aesthetics. Not overly attached to one style, the wide spectrum of artistic mediums and styles he employs to express himself is a true testament to the fact that Cummings’ identity as an artist was a condition, and not a profession.

"Future Islands"



Hwang, Hannah. *Future Islands*. 2013. Watercolor on paper. 10 x 15 in.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Soviet Union *1931*

Increasingly disillusioned with American consumer culture, Cummings traveled to the Soviet Union in the Fall of 1931, as a means of traveling to a land where he heard equality was not only expected, but steadfastly maintained. Cummings' time in New York City led him to have a callous heart against all of the commercialism and lack of individuality in popular and advertising culture, and he was losing inspiration for his works as an effect. He traveled to Europe to escape the monotony of his Greenwich Village lifestyle, when some of his acquaintances, whom he visited with in Paris, France, ignited in him a curiosity and desire to encounter for himself the illustrious and mysterious nation.

After about a month of preparation, Cummings boarded a train for Moscow on May 31. His mother and friends all aided Cummings with this decision, although only a handful of his most eclectic friends fully encouraged him. Although Cummings did not have a specific reason for wanting to visit other than his curious spirit and attraction to the mysterious, "his philosophy of individualism ran so completely counter to collectivism that he must have known he would loathe what he found," (Kennedy 309). Cummings would leave the Soviet Union with no answers, which is appropriate considering the fact that he did not have any specific questions to begin with.

In fact, a lot of his observations about the country reflect this attitude: he used the words "unworld," "nonmeat," and "nonmales" to describe the atmosphere, food and

women of the Soviet Union, respectively (Kennedy 330). The absence of description, rather than a direct criticism or opposing statement of the people, objects and places he encountered may have been just a result of Cummings' paranoia with the government, who were not above random and intense searches. However, it could also symbolize the lack of individuality he thought he would find there.

However, Cummings did not leave the Soviet Union completely disenchanted; he saw hope in the youth of Odessa, a city where he "felt the young people were still alive to life," (Sawyer-Laucanno 347). He also found that when he had the opportunity to visit with individuals intimately and exclusively, he, even with his broken Russian, was able to find joyous and humorous moments to cherish in the otherwise strange and oppressive land. On one particular train ride, Cummings and his fellow travelers asked each other questions about themselves, laughing together while making light of the secret police who were aggressive and unpleasant towards the passengers. Cummings would sympathize with them and their despotic societal atmosphere for the rest of his life.

"*Eimi*," meaning "I am" in Greek, is a recreation of Cummings' travel diary during his trip to the Soviet Union in 1932. It is through these journal entries Cummings kept that served as the fuel for the poems he would publish in *No Thanks*. This particular volume of poetry, because of the subject matter, was rejected by 11 different publishing houses, all of which Cummings used to create a poem-painting of an urn, comprised by a list of each of the names. This was Cummings' retaliation against American commercialism, which, although not explicitly and blatantly was against individualism, was still subtly and passively so. The hypocrisy Cummings felt they showed angered him; he wrote extensively on the subject in his poems.

His poem, “let’s start a magazine,” the 24<sup>th</sup> poem in this volume of poetry, serves as a perfect example of the rebellious, yet humorous, attitude he adopted from his time abroad. By depicting himself in a red hat, with a gold over-lay in his “self-portrait in red hat,” Cummings expresses through his art just how much of an individual he is, not associating with either nation: America or the Soviet Union.

“let’s start a magazine

to hell with literature  
we want something redblooded

lousy with pure  
reeking with stark  
and fearlessly obscene

but really clean  
get what I mean  
let’s not spoil it  
let’s make it serious

something authentic and delirious  
you know something genuine like a mark  
in a toilet

graced with guts and gutted  
with grace”

**squeeze your nuts and open your face**

*Poetry*  
“let’s start a magazine”

The most distinguishing formal aspects of this poem are the quotation marks that encompass the majority of the poem: only the last stanza, a lone singular line, remains on the outside. The quotation marks begin, yet do not end, the poem, indicating that Cummings skews his voice as the speaker of the poem, thus negating the words included between the quotation marks as ironic. The dismissal of the majority of the lines of this poem as untrue parallels Cummings’ descriptions of the Soviet Union in his travel diary: this poem serves as yet another “non-.” Similarly, this poem exhibits what Cummings avoids and dislikes, rather than highlighting what he upholds as sacred and good; this poem was written at a time when Cummings was disillusioned with not just America, but with the Soviet Union as well. For this reason, presenting a lack of something, which in this case can be likened to hope, speaks louder in this case to exhibit Cummings’ internal emotional and intellectual state, much better than an explicit statement would.

The first comparison Cummings makes in this poem is between magazines and literature as reading material. Magazines, primarily visual and temporary in nature, are what he advocates, and he literally damns literature, as he feels it is not “redblooded” enough (3). The mention of magazines may also be an allusion to the sorry state of the publishing industry, as Cummings perceived it to be, because he struggled getting *No Thanks* published while literary colleagues such as Olin Hemingway were getting paid handsomely to contribute monthly literary works to *Esquire* (Sawyer-Laucanno 390).

Although the stanzas are visually reflective, in that the stanzas increase then decrease in line number steadily as the poem progresses, this poem lacks uniform reason.

This brings us again to the quotation marks. The isolation of the last line of the poem, as the only outcast outside of the quote, indicates that as a conclusion to the literary work, Cummings criticizes those who willingly compromise a portion of their individuality for money, such as Hemingway, mentioned above. This criticism carries even more weight, as Cummings begins three out of the 16 lines with “let’s,” all of them within the quotation marks. The two yours located within the last line, by contrast, focuses on the fact that although Cummings had the opportunity to sell out, he didn’t. The meaning of this last sentence, then, can be perceived genuinely, although not literally, since he has omitted himself from those mentioned in the first six stanzas. Cummings concludes with “squeeze your nuts and open your face” (16); a graphic and shrill statement that reflects his bitterness at both American commercialism and Soviet oppression. The vulgarity of the term “nuts” cheapens the poem, and expresses the primitive anger Cummings has on this subject matter.

In fact, Cummings brings up a lot of imagery about the biological functions of the human body dealing with bowel movements and human excrement towards the end of the poem, adding to the unorthodox content matter and tone of the poem. The inversion of the words in the sixth stanza, “graced with guts and gutted/with grace” (14-15), the last two lines of the quote, particularly alert the reader to be aware of the differences between the two. The alliteration of these two words, “grace” and “guts,” only emphasize the disparity between the two meanings of the terms, as they look and sound similar. This inversion parallels Cummings’ view on America and the Soviet Union as opposites of each other who eerily seem similar; both societies end up stifling the freedoms and individuality of their people.

“Nope”

“(#nope)”

“self-portrait in red hat”



Cummings, E.E. *self-portrait in red hat*.

*Painting*  
*“self-portrait in red hat”*

Painted with oil on a 16” x 12” canvas, this self-portrait of Cummings captures the artist with a stoic and stern expression. With wide and textured brushstrokes, and an unevenness in the swatches of paint, this portrait indicates that it was created with more visceral, than intellectual, implications in mind. Cummings’ gaze is focused somewhere off into the distance, but his pose, with his back stiff, and shoulders squared, prevent the viewer from believing that he is unaware of that fact that he is being observed. It is false doubly in the sense that Cummings tries to persuade the audience, in his own self-portrait, that he is either ignorant with the fact that he is being observed, or unconcerned.

His sartorial choices in the portrait indicate that he is dressed informally. His red cap, which, because of its floppy and malleable appearance, can only be assumed to be made of a soft material such as cotton or knit, reiterates the idea that Cummings is dressed casually, or even lowly. Dated as having been painted in the mid-1930s, Cummings definitely painted this with his visit to the Soviet Union in mind. His hat, brightly colored red, alludes to the red of communist idealism. The color to them, other than the fact that their name for red is etymologically connected to their term for “beautiful,” symbolized the blood shed in the quest for emancipation from oppressive and unjust governments. By having such a symbolic color demeaned into such a simple and casual accessory, Cummings trivializes and criticizes the Soviet Union. His blank expression and indirect gaze in the portrait while wearing the hat expresses the effects of communist and socialist governments on their citizens.

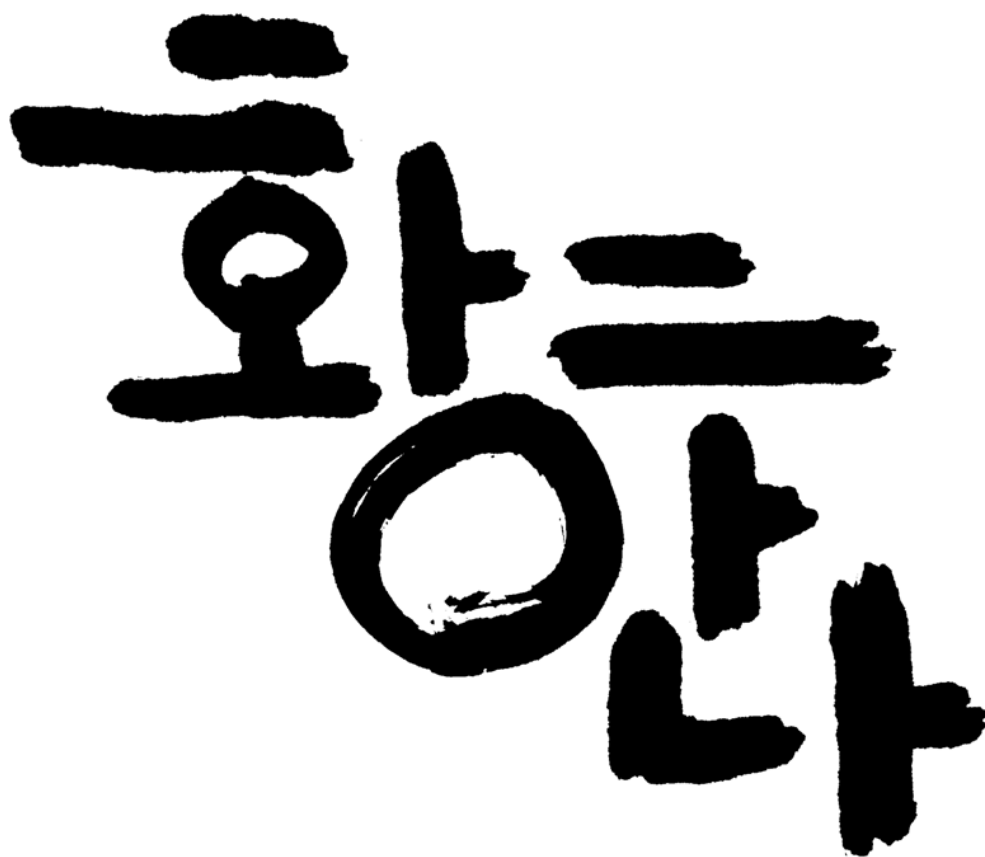
Gold has traditionally been a color reserved for the sacred, noble or wealthy. By having gold appear almost entirely across the entire canvas, Cummings elevates himself to an individual of such status. The gold that overlaps his clothing gives off the impression that Cummings is drowning in it; the portrait does not seem to be rooted in realism, but rather idealism. The disparity between his clothes and the style of the painting indicates that Cummings wanted to make a statement that expresses otherwise. This too implies that the portrait is an attempt to express the fact that it is to be a symbol, rather than a realistic representation, of the ideology Cummings holds about American and Soviet societies and politics.

However, the portrait does not just simply mock and criticize; the big swatch of green paint on the upper right hand side of the portrait symbolizes the hope that Cummings has for society. As he is gazing towards the same side in the portrait, Cummings the painter indicates that he desires for Cummings the subject to see it. By placing it so close, but making it unattainable, Cummings both exhibits the current state of society, while interjecting the portrait with his own opinion about the matter.

Although Cummings' visit to the Soviet Union frustrated him, the trip proved to be beneficial in helping to solidify his individual stance on various world matters. Through his travels, he was able to understand that his disillusionment with American consumerism and commercialism would not be solved by his visiting or moving to another country. The issues he had externalized and attributed to the oppressive and hypocritical American society he was raised in turned out to be, in fact, issues that he would encounter with any other culture he could have been brought up in. The internalization of his dissatisfaction with various aspects of multiple societies allowed

Cummings to become a truly radical and uniquely creative individual; in this period of his life, he would exercise to the best of his ability the freedom to experiment and express himself in the most avant-garde ways he could manage. The results of his efforts manifest themselves into some of Cummings' most unique and emotionally charged works of art.

“Self-Portrait in Calligraphy”



Hwang, Hannah. *Self-Portrait in Calligraphy*. 2013. Ink on paper. 15 x 15 in.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Joy Farm *1894-1962*

Although Cummings and his third and final wife, Marion Morehouse, fervently fought to maintain their New York City residence at 4 Patchin Place amidst city renovations, they increasingly spent more time at their New Hampshire home, Joy Farm as they both aged. Once Cummings and Morehouse were allowed to keep Patchin Place for themselves, they acquired more space in their apartment, thereby expanding their space together into two units on the bottom two floors, while maintaining Cummings' personal studio space on the third. These renovations brought the final grand total of their apartment space to five rooms. Similar improvements were made at Joy Farm as well; to help Morehouse with her photography hobby, Cummings installed electricity and heating into their home, making it possible for Morehouse to create and maintain her own darkroom, thereby allowing photography to become a year-round activity. With this increase of technology at their Joy Farm, Cummings and Marion, both with spotty bouts of health and illness, were allowed to start extending their summer stays well into the autumn, and sometimes even into the winter. Mounting tensions surrounding the onset of World War II were also easier to ignore in the countryside.

An increase in his time in at the farm meant he was even freer to indulge in his favorite pastimes: observing and perceiving the world around him. The world he was now surrounded by, as filled with natural events and creatures, would allow for Cummings to find a sense of contentment and wonder without the strenuous lifestyle of the city. He

began to prefer the relaxing calm of Joy Farm to the stimulating intensity of Patchen Place. At Joy Farm, his poems came softer and slower; although writing poetry and painting were still essential to Cummings' life, he was not so obsessed with writing with an agenda as he once was.

As his fame increased, so did his anxiety. Cummings felt severe unrest during the latter years of his life, in that he felt that he had two separate and disparate identities. He, in descriptions about both halves of his identity, obviously favored one over the other. The first of his identities is the one he loathes ("short, hateful, & dogmatic-especially re women... Nobody can understand him, because he's so superior in kind...") while the second is the one he prefers ("he's warm, cheerful & adventurous, with a quick sense of humor-the world is a perpetual amazement to him"). Although the first version of Cummings, the isolationist Cummings, would never fully disappear, he became aware that it was easier for him to be the second version of himself when he was in New Hampshire. Less introspection seemed to be the solution to keeping latter Cummings around, as he concluded the document musing, "He has no time to judge people, he's too busy being He" (Sawyer-Laucanno 502-503).

A naturally observant individual, less introspection meant his attention was now focused elsewhere; he increasingly became interested in the lives of his animal neighbors who visited his home on a frequent basis. Most mornings began with either Cummings or Morehouse setting out sugar-water for the birds, or seed and feed for the other animals (Reef 125). Cummings, in a letter to his old friend Hildegard, who the wife of his best friend J. Sibley Watson, that written on August 12, 1956, writes of one of his interactions with a chipmunk:

“utterly & entirely “enchanted”(to use Marion’s beautiful word)-lovely,eager,velocitous,trusting,a perfect poem of a creature,” Cummings later writes that after this creature had “[danced] all over [their] hearts,” the sorrow both he and Marion felt was so deep that they both “could scarcely hold up our heads.” (Stade 237)

His deep attachment to the animals on the farm indicated a movement toward effortless contentment and peace. Prior to this, Cummings received his tranquility of spirit, mind and soul from expressing and organizing all of his perceptions, intellectualizations and sensations on paper or canvas.

The rest of the days spent at Joy Farm would be spent similarly: observing nature, writing letters, leisurely writing and painting. In the late fall of 1962, on September 2, Cummings, after a morning of chopping wood, would climb the stairs of the main home on the farm, and collapse, never to be conscious again. His cause of death: cerebral hemorrhage. Morehouse, who found him, would grieve for seven years before her own loss in the battle against lung cancer. His death proved to be poetic in that he started to adopt, rather than rebel, against all that his father had taught him: “after he finished, he turned the grindstone and sharpened the axe, leaving it all ready for the next time, just as his father had taught him,” (Kennedy 284). Prior, Cummings was constantly finding new sources of resolution and peace at Joy Farm before his death. Other examples include his relationship with his biological daughter Nancy, they had repaired their relationship enough to the fact that her children would attend their grandfather’s quaint funeral of her behalf.

Following his death, his widow, Morehouse, would aid one of his biographers, George J. Firmage in selecting the works to be published in Cummings’ only posthumous collection of poetry, *73 Poems*. The following poem, “D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y,” reflects

perfectly the half of Cummings he wholly wanted, and actually was, to be: an individual who had the capacity to feel “perpetual amazement.”

66

D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y

leaves  
(sEe)  
locked

in

gOLd  
after-  
gLOW

are

t  
ReMbLiN  
g

,,:,:,,

*Poetry*  
*“D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y”*

“D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y” begins and ends with single capitalized letters, which sandwich a rhythmic dance between more two more single capitalized letters, six hyphens, and three lowercase lettered couples. The result is an emphasis on the protraction in which the word is to be read and/or heard aloud. As opposed to if he had inverted this pattern, and began with a lowercase letter, or even if he had begun with two letters instead of one, before the first hyphen, the uppercase letter denotes that in keeping with the traditional rules of English grammar and capitalizing the first letter of a complete sentence, this poem also presents one complete and formally organized thought as well. Also, the form of this line is repeated in the entire poem as a whole, in that there is symmetry mirrored in seven stanzas, with the first, third, fifth and seventh stanzas corresponding to the capitalized one-letters, and the second, fourth and sixth stanzas longer in length, parallel to the two-lettered groups, “re,” “mi,” and “gl” in the first line.

As the second stanza of this poem, the three words, “leaves,” “see” and “locked” all work together as one cohesive unit, bonded by alliteration and assonance, to bring attention to a scene in nature. Leaves are the subject of Cummings’ attention, and therefore is the first word in this stanza. The second word, “see,” is stylized as “(sEe).” The parenthesis around the verb alerts the reader that this term is not to be the main focus of the stanza, but rather a secondary point to consider. Parentheses were created to provide opportunities for writers to provide supplementary information within a sentence; thus, “see,” is used as an explanatory term, used to reinforce the importance of the leaves themselves, not the act of noticing them. The next and final word of the stanza is

“locked,” which means fastened, secured, or immovable. These three terms, together then, collectively form one joint idea. Cummings draws the readers’ attention to the leaves in the poem, and creates suspense, by not revealing any details about the leaves just yet, just that they are important to be observed.

Finally, the last line of the poem employs a strict use of solely punctuation marks. Cummings uses commas, semicolons, colons and a period as a means to conclude and summarize the ideals presented in his poem. In keeping with his theme of symmetry, this last line is also symmetrical: the line reads, “,:,:,:,” There are seven punctuation marks, which correspond to each of the seven stanzas of the poem. The marks then, provide emphasis, and therefore clarify the meaning of each stanza in relation to the poem as a whole complete idea and sentiment. Commas cause the reader to pause, which places more emphasis on the words before and after this mark. Semicolons connect two complete sentences together, while colons, like commas, cause the reader to stop. It brings more attention to what was before the colon, and indicates to the reader that the supplementary information provided after is a continuation, or explanation, of the first part of the sentence. Periods denote a complete thought, and come at the end of every sentence. All together then, a single complete thought is surrounded by explanatory bisectional sentences, which is then sandwiched by two complete, yet connected thoughts, and all covered by pauses. From the inside out, the layers of this poem become more abstract, general and implicit in the presentation of the meaning.

“I:cebeRgs”

I:cebeRgs

f-R-e-s-h  
w~a~t~e~R  
\*s\*n\*o\*w\*

!!!!!!!  
beRgybIts  
g.R.o.w.l

“fall landscape:chocorua”



Cummings, E.E. *fall landscape:chocorua*. Undated. Oil on canvas. 16 x 12 in. Ken Lopez, Hadley.

*Painting*  
*“fall landscape:chocorua”*

In 1937, Cummings, as he always did, spent his summer at Joy Farm. A frequent and consistent sight throughout his whole life, Mt. Chocorua represented the infallibility of nature for and the evolution of the New Hampshire summer season around this seemingly un-aging mountain can be seen as captured by Cummings and his paintbrush. This subject, as a barrier that kept Joy Farm a safe and happy home, away from the hectic lifestyle he led of New York City, symbolized the state of mind Cummings would adopt as he started to ease himself into the country lifestyle. In this landscape portrait, Cummings again chooses to depict this familiar subject. One major stylistic difference Cummings adds to this particular landscape of the mountain is that it is framed by leaves of two yellowing tree branches; most of his other portraits of Chocorua do not contain any other subject matter that so loudly draws the viewer's attention away to anything else other than the mountain.

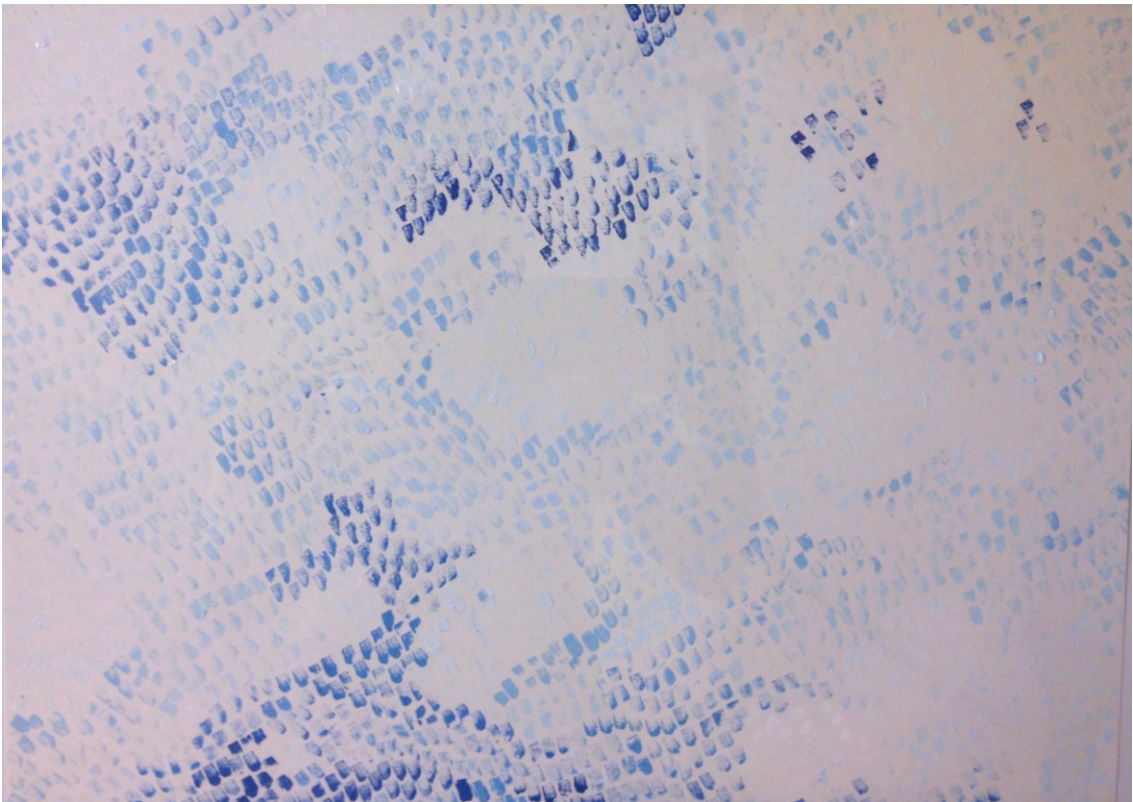
Yellow, as the dominant color in the painting, emphasizes the action of the seasons actively changing. The addition of the green and red trees in the middle ground especially shows this. That is, Cummings, by making yellow the dominant color in the palette, focuses on the action of nature; the yellow highlight accentuates the beauty of the shifting of the seasons from Summer to Fall. Cummings injects humility into the work by making the process of transition the focus. Yellow, as a color that only captures the fleeting moments in nature, and is never the center of attention, becomes immortalized through art.

On the back on a paper pamphlet for an art symposium that took place on August 24, 1936, Cummings wrote that “a picture is it’s own frame” (Cummings). This epiphany definitely showcases itself in this painting, as Cummings uses nature, rather than his canvas, to highlight the mountain. By doing so, Cummings elevates nature and humbles himself, thus reflecting his belief that an artist’s responsibility is to actively observe and reflect upon the observations they make, rather than passively ignore it, or try to control it. This humbling disposition, as a direct influence of the peace he received from the slower pace of life he lead every time he stayed at Joy Farm, reflects the instances when Cummings was able to be consistently amazed with nature.

Only 12” x 16” large, this landscape, as the framing of the branches in the foreground also does, emits a sense of intense intimacy and quiet calmness. Such small canvases require the artist to pay more attention to the details of the scene they are recording, as there is not a lot of room for expressive and spontaneous movement with the paintbrush. In this way, Cummings regards the mountain more intimately, and the details of the various shadows and shades embedded into the rock are painted with softer colors and gentler brushstrokes, as evidenced by the smoothness of the surface.

This painting, in addition to his praise of the ethereal aspects of nature in “D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y” exhibit the humility that Cummings adopted in the later stages of his own life, as he allowed the egotistical version of him give way to the visceral and sensitive Cummings. By simultaneously praising nature for its superiority over humanity in its immortal and supernatural qualities and also humbling it to make it more relatable, Cummings advocates for a society where both intellectual and visceral facets of human experience can live in harmony with each other, poetically.

“Ocean Map:Lost”



Hwang, Hannah. *Ocean Map:Lost*. 2013. Acrylic on paper. 13 x 18 in.

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