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**George Dibble and the Struggle for Modern Art in Utah**

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George Dibble and the Struggle for Modern Art in Utah

Sarah Dibble

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis I explore the spread of modern art to conservative regions of the country, in particular Utah. By using George Dibble as a case study this thesis will also address the struggle that Utah artists had to endure to have their progressive ideas in art be accepted in such a conservative area. It will address the criticism that Dibble had to endure by discussing specific incidents involved with certain works of art. Although there were plenty of people who did not like modern art, there were some institutions and people who were advocates of this progressive form of art. Through determination and persevering through challenges, artists like Dibble made it easier for the next generation of modern artists to gain acceptance. Dibble and his generation of artists opened the door to the acceptance of truly abstract and modern works of the Abstract Expressionist.

This thesis also will deal with the origins of modernism in America and how it spread throughout the country starting with the Amory Show in New York in 1913 and going through the Great Depression with the WPA. It will examine the artistic climate of Utah during the first three decades of the twentieth century and artists who came before Dibble who came in contact with the European modernists. Although there has been some scholarship on the history of Utah art, there has been little written on the spread of Modern art through the state. Utah art historian Bob Olpin has done the most scholarship on Dibble and his contemporaries.

Keywords: Utah art, George Dibble, twentieth century art, modern art, American art.
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Introduction

During the early decades of the twentieth century artists from all over the Western United States, including Utah, traveled to the East Coast and Europe to study art in locations such as New York and Paris, where new movements and styles in the visual arts were starting to emerge. The new forms of art were abstract and different from the academic art that had been seen previously. These new theories and ideas began to form in Europe around the turn of the twentieth century and were then imported to the United States through art schools in New York City such as the Art Students League. In turn these ideas would eventually be taken back to the West by aspiring young artists who wanted to share them with other artists and to make them known to the public.

Artists from Utah were inspired and fascinated by the individual expression and freedom of form found in these new and creative movements, which allowed the artist to experiment with styles and techniques unlike any others that they had previously seen. These artists were also inspired by new innovations in the use of color, line, and perspective and brought fresh ideas back to their home state. Upon their return and before they could share their love of modern art, these artists faced the challenge of breaking down conservative barriers in a community that was long considered a little backward. In the late 1930s through the mid 1950s the ideas and theories of modernism were new and foreign to the people of Utah, even if they were older and already established in places like New York City. During these two decades, a select group of Utah artists decided to bring about a drastic and what some thought of as shocking change to the art world of Utah.

Modern art was not favorable in Utah for various reasons. One of those reasons was because the stylistic elements found in much of modern art including the bold use of color, a lack
of representational elements and experimental perspective had not been experienced by the
general public before on a large scale. There were political issues with modern art as well - such
as the ties that some modernists had to Communism - which caused a mistrust of the art. Avant-
garde art was disliked because many people believed that this new style did not reflect the beauty
seen in nature. This new movement was also seen by some as a debasement of art.¹

However, this aesthetic was problematic for the general public because for centuries in
Western culture visual art was used to tell stories or teach lessons, causing people to expect to
see recognizable objects or a story when viewing a painting. Artists of the past expressed their
thoughts and feelings through figures, forms and objects portrayed in an academic and orderly
manner. With the emergence of modern art, artists began to freely replace stories and instruction
with the expression of their own thoughts, ideas and feelings without the use of objects and
recognizable figures. This made it difficult for the public to understand the meaning behind their
art. The expression of thoughts and feelings in paintings was not new, artists of the past
expressed these same beliefs through objects and figures, but it was the boldness with which
these beliefs were expressed in modernism which alarmed the public. During the 1930s when
modern styles and aesthetics were brought back to Salt Lake City, they were challenged because
they did not focus enough on content or the subject matter, but focused on form and technique.

Some Utah artists could sense the impact these new theories and ideas could have on the
development of art when they were applied to painting. One artist who made a major impact on
the development of modern art in Utah was George Smith Dibble (1904-1991). Despite
opposition from the public, Dibble and a circle of artists with similar views were determined to
bring modernism to the attention of the citizens and artists of Utah. Through their efforts and

¹ George Dibble “History of Modern Art in Utah” DVD, based on a lecture given at the Salt Lake Art Center, 1985.
work they continued to keep modern art at the forefront of the minds of the art community through various means, including exhibits held at various institutions and community centers in Salt Lake City and other cities in Utah. Dibble’s paintings often acted as the battle ground between conservative artists and the modernists. Dibble successfully overcame the prejudices of the public and critics to become one of the most influential artists in Utah. The personal criticism and accounts of the rejection of particular paintings by conservative artists and critics are important to the history of art in Utah because it shows that there was a struggle for the acceptance of modern art in the state.

This thesis will use George Dibble as a case study to examine the struggle for the acceptance of modernism in Utah art during the 1940s and 1950s. The challenges that modern artists had to endure to secure the acceptance of modernism in the visual arts in Utah will be discussed as well as the importance of this struggle in the history of art and culture of the state. This thesis will moreover explore the public reaction to the modern art movement in Utah and how this affected the way in which modern art was exhibited and viewed, as well as the work that was produced. Although these artists and their work were criticized and ridiculed, they continued to create and push the visual arts in Utah. Ultimately their hard work and perseverance in the 1940s paved the way for the next generation of artists wanting to push the boundaries of art.²

There is an extensive list of scholarship on modernism during the decades of the 1930s and the 1950s, including the writings of scholars interested in American modernism.³ On the

³ There are many scholars who have written on the topic of American modernism and its history, including those who have been referred to in this thesis. T.J. Clark’s book Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism focuses on the history of modern American art in the early twentieth century. Patricia Hills has written
other hand, there has been little scholarship done regarding the modern art movement in Utah during the first half of the twentieth century, especially the years between the 1930s and the mid 1950s. The primary scholar on this period is Robert S. Olpin, a historian of Utah art. Olpin co-authored several books and exhibition catalogs on Utah artists and their works, including *The Dictionary of Utah Art* and the survey book *Utah Art*, which he coauthored with Vern Swanson and William Seifrit. In his books and surveys on the history of art in Utah, Olpin discussed the lives and careers of artists, including those who had a hand in gaining acceptance for modern art. Even though Olpin discussed many of the important art historical events in Utah, he neglected to discuss in depth the struggles of the modern artists and the reason why this struggle was important. Even less scholarship has been done on the work of George Dibble and its impact on the history of Utah art. Olpin wrote exhibition catalogs for several shows which featured Dibble, including an exhibit at the Utah Museum of Fine Art in 1988 entitled *George Dibble: Painter-Teacher-Critic*. Olpin’s writings failed to adequately discuss the struggle for modern artists to gain acceptance in Utah.

Building upon existing scholarship, as well as upon Dibble’s own writings in *The Salt Lake Tribune* and his unpublished personal writings and interviews, this thesis discusses the lag between the development of modern art in New York and other parts of America. In order to argue the importance of the struggle that modern artists had to endure to be accepted in a conservative region, this thesis will also combine some previous research done on Utah art. This

extensively on American art in general, and her book *Modern Art in the USA: Issues and Controversies of the 20th Century* focuses on American modernism and the issues surrounding modern art in the twentieth century. She has written on specific American modern artists such as Stuart Davis. In Milton Brown’s books *The Story of the Armory Show* and *American Painting: From the Armory Show to the Depression* he discusses the history of the Armory Show as well as the transition of modernism from Europe to America in the early years of the twentieth century. Karal Ann Marling has published several books on American art. Marling’s book *Wall to Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression* focuses on the history of many of the WPA murals in government buildings painted during the Great Depression.
thesis will show how Utah modernists like Dibble, with their new ideas and techniques, tried to narrow the cultural gap between the East Coast and regions of the West, and attempted to gain acceptance for modern art.

**Background of Modernism**

To understand why modernism in the visual arts was so challenging to the public in Utah, it is necessary to understand what it was and the challenges surrounding its establishment in America during the first half of the twentieth century. All would agree that modernism is a complex term. In 1916 Arthur Wesley Dow stated, “Modernism is an inclusive name applied to the many forms of rebellion against the accepted and traditional.” As Dow saw it, the term modernism could be applied to anything which went against the established tradition. The modernists and their supporters were considered the foe in the fight against tradition. To truly understand modernism in the visual arts, one needs to be acquainted with European innovations in the arts. T.J. Clark defined modernism as “turning from past to future, the acceptance of risk, the omnipresence of change, and the malleability of time and space.” Modern artists knew that there were risks associated with change and new ideas, but they also understood that to be able to progress toward a new era in art they had to accept the risks of breaking away from the past. Modernism also had an underlying philosophy that art must be alive and constantly changing. These new ideas and changes are included in the various components of modernism along with the importance of form and technique over content, the breaking away from the academic tradition, the unconventional use of bold colors and a new treatment of perspective.

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The aspect of the emphasis of form over content was particularly important to Dibble who did not take back home all of the aspects of modernism. Content in paintings has always been important because paintings were meant to tell a story or to portray a literary or historical event. Since the seventeenth century in the Academies of Europe, such as the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, the only accepted paintings were those which portrayed historical or allegorical themes, portraits, landscapes, or still lives. There was an emphasis on correctly drawing the human form included in the curriculum at these academies, which modernists would not stress. With modernism however, the actual content in the art was not as important as the ideas, theories or politics behind the art that helped create the visual elements. The visual elements in modernism were also crucial and ranged from nonrepresentational forms, to bold colors, daring color combinations, and skewed perspective such as those found in *Harmony in Red* by Matisse [Fig. 1] to the simplification of forms found in Picasso’s *Farmers Wife* [Fig. 2] In addition there was an emphasis on stripping art down to its essentials, using what was necessary and leaving the other elements out.8

Another of the main tenets of modern art was the desire to break away from the academic tradition of the past such as those found in the European Academies and to encourage a freedom of expression in art. For centuries the French Academies stressed copying plaster casts of sculptural masterpieces as well as paintings to gain knowledge of proportions and to be able to create naturalistic art.9 Once the students mastered the casts, then they had the opportunity to draw from life. As part of their training, the students imitated the style and techniques of their instructors. In the nineteenth century art schools in America, such as the National Academy of

Design, which was founded in 1825, followed the pattern of the French Academies and many art schools continued with this same system into the twentieth century. The academic system did not allow for much innovation in the production of art and was seen by later artists, like John Sloan and Robert Henri, as too stifling.\textsuperscript{10}

In the late nineteenth century artists in New York began to challenge the National Academy of Design’s and other art schools’ rules on style and subject matter. Certain artists, such as the modernist Max Weber, believed that an artist should not paint what they literally saw as the academies taught at the time, but rather they should capture their emotional response to the scene.\textsuperscript{11} This allowed the artist more openness to state their own emotions and feelings in their work, not just the proof that they could paint in an academic manner. In 1875 a group of students broke with the National Academy of Design to form the Art Students League of New York. The Art Students League became a school which was controlled by the students and earned a reputation early for doing things their own way. According to scholar Raymond Steiner, even from the beginning the Art Students League “was characterized by a spirit which included not only one of irreverence for the past but of camaraderie, of excitement, of innovation and of exploration while at the same time, establishing itself as a serious art school.”\textsuperscript{12} It was considered a radical school at the time not only because it was managed by the students but also because it admitted and treated women as equals, even in its management.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Steiner, 41.
With the help of the modern ideas of the Art Students League and other institutions like it, New York City was the place where modernism began to flourish in America during the 1910s and 1920s. In 1913, New York was the site of an exhibition which changed the reception of American art and the way the American public perceived the avant-garde trends in art coming from Europe. The exhibition, organized by Walt Kuhn and Arthur Davies, was officially titled the International Exhibit of Modern Art, but was informally known as the Armory Show of 1913. An estimated 1,600 works were exhibited at what was designed to be the first major exhibition of European modern art in America, about one third of the works being foreign.\textsuperscript{14} Although the exhibit included older, more conservative European artistic styles such as Romantic artists Goya and Ingres, it also featured many of the progressive European artists associated with the developing trends in art at the time.\textsuperscript{15} The exhibition featured progressive artists involved in Fauvism, Futurism and Cubism and names like Matisse, Picasso, Braque, and Duchamp.\textsuperscript{16}

Before the Armory Show opened, there were misgivings regarding the new trends and ideas in European art due to the unfamiliarity of Americans with the new styles. Kuhn and Davies desired the exhibition to be an opportunity for the American public to come in contact with new European ideas to which many American artists had already been introduced through their studies and travels abroad. Although the Armory Show was the first large scale exhibition of European modernism in America, modern art had been displayed earlier in smaller venues in New York such as the gallery “291”. This gallery, which was owned by Alfred Stieglitz, a photographer and supporter of modern art, was a gathering place for modern artists. It was also a place where many European modernists such as Matisse and Picasso had their works exhibited.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 110.
\textsuperscript{15} Milton Brown, \textit{The Story of the Armory Show}, 112.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 44.
along with emerging American modernists. The support of people like Stieglitz added to the yearning felt by modernists to break away from the traditional way of learning through the search for new styles, forms and subject matter which eventually brought down the academy.\(^{17}\)

The modern art at the Armory Show was shocking because it was unfamiliar to the general public and was not what they expected. For example, the public was taken aback by Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*. As Brown stated, it was chosen by the press as the symbol of the incomprehensiveness and ridiculousness of modern art.\(^{18}\) There were numerous jokes, cartoons and criticisms of Duchamp’s work, mainly because of lack of understanding of modernism.\(^{19}\) The forms in this painting are distorted and the figure is barely recognizable. The American public, by and large, wanted to see conservative and academic art which contained figures that they could discern. However, after the initial shock and with more exposure to European modernism, portions of the public began to perceive progressive art in a more favorable light. Some people who entered the gallery of modern European art at the Armory Show were intrigued by the semi-abstract forms that they saw, and soon after New York became an important market for modern art.\(^{20}\) The Armory Show shook America out of its “lethargic sleep,” and opened its eyes to the idea of modern art although they did not necessarily like what they saw.\(^{21}\)

While modern art began to be increasingly accepted in places like New York City after 1913, it took thirty years for a new generation of artists in Utah to expose the public to

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\(^{21}\) Ibid, 112.
progressive art of Cubism and Fauvism on a large scale. The lag between modernism in New York and modernism in places such as Utah was due in part because of the conservative tastes and attitudes of certain regions of the country which allowed for a longer period of acclimatization to the new trends in art. Speaking of the delay between the acceptance of modern art in New York and places in the West, artist Thomas Hart Benton said “The people of the west are highly intolerant of departing from the right, usual, or normal course.” In Utah and other conservative regions, the usual or normal course in the visual arts consisted of conservative ideas and academic styles in painting. The normal course in art for people in Utah was the familiar, namely landscapes and portraits painted in an academic manner, not in the new modernist techniques coming from Europe. To people with conservative tastes, modern art appeared to be the departure from the usual course making it difficult for modern art to be accepted in Utah as readily as it was accepted in New York.

In the period leading up to World War I there were individual American artists around the country exploring the possibilities of modernism. Americans during this time also continued to travel to Europe for training until the beginning of the war in 1914. These individuals sought European training and studied in Paris and other European cities in addition to New York City. Among these American artists were Benton and John Marin. However, during World War I things changed. America experienced a period of isolationism. This was a period of great patriotism in America and distrust of everything European, including modernist ideas and art. The years between the two world wars were a time of great prosperity in America which led to a boom in art production. The 1920s was a period when modern European ideas in art re-

24 Ibid, 55.
emerged in America and were promoted by sculptors, painters and photographers. Although nationalism and isolationism was still strong in the 1920s, this was a time when artists started to travel again to Europe to bring home more modernist art and ideas. Americans continued to learn from European artists and in cities such as New York with the support of Stieglitz and the opening of the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, the avant-garde ideas became less suspicious.

In the years following World War I European styles and ideas gradually gained popularity in America. This was also a period when there was a good deal of discussion regarding what was considered “American art”. The idea of the American Scene was built upon the desire for a national form of art and many American artists began to look to America for everything, including training and subject matter. Many artists, such as Stuart Davis, combined what they found in America with European styles. Eventually Davis realized that the American art scene had more vitality than Europe and turned to a style which was a combination of European modernism and American subject matter as seen in his series of paintings depicting New York in a Cubist style. By the 1930s New York was established as a great artistic center which only grew in the build up and destruction of World War II when it became the new cultural center of the Western world and the only city cosmopolitan enough to replace Paris.

With the crash of the stock market in October of 1929 up until World War II, many American artists struggled to find their own individual style of art. This was also a time when there were many artists who were living on a stipend from the government and experimenting with styles. Throughout the country federal work projects of President Roosevelt’s Administration such as the WPA (Work Progress Administration and Works Projects

25 Patricia Hills, Modern Art in the USA, 43.
26 Ibid.
27 Patricia Hills, Stuart Davis, 80.
28 Guilbaut, 63.
Administration) sponsored artists by hiring them to paint murals in public buildings such as post offices and courthouses. The purpose of the WPA and other agencies such as the PWAP (Public Works of Art Project) was to help employ artists as well as instill in Americans a sense of pride in their country. Much of the art of the WPA depicted the everyday life of the average American and included the daily labors of farmers, coal miners, and other industrial workers throughout the country. Some artists used the murals of the WPA as a form of patriotism by depicting the labor of ordinary people as heroic.

In the Depression, modern art appeared to spread through America with the help of the WPA, especially in the more rural regions of the country. The WPA hired artists from all over the country to paint murals in government buildings in the different states. Many artists were hired to work in their home state while others traveled to different states. These artists were trained in various places including New York. When hired by the WPA, artists brought their own style which they adjusted to fit the rather homogeneous content in the art which was created for public spaces. The theme of these murals was based on historical events, whose positive social worth, as Karal Marling has said, “calmed public apprehensions of imminent catastrophe” acting as a type of social therapy. While these murals were based on historical themes, they were painted in a variety of styles, including a form of Cubism. In each individual Cubist mural elements of Cubism - such as the flattening of the picture plane, the emphasis of two dimensional surfaces and the tendency to adjust the scale of the objects according to the artist’s personal taste rather than accuracy - were applied in varying degrees. Some of these modern murals however did not receive support from the public. For example, the court house mural in Aiken, South

31 Ibid, 9.
32 Ibid.
Carolina by Stefan Hirsch was a point of controversy for various reasons. The people of Aiken argued that the mural did not reflect the artistic taste of the town nor did it conform to the Southern conception of art, proving that even though modern art was spreading across the country, there were still places that did not welcome it.33

In addition to creating projects and hiring artists, the federal art projects of the New Deal established the Community Art Center program which created a network of sites for art education, exhibitions, and general discussion of art all over the country including Utah. These centers were staffed by instructors trained by the WPA. Each center held exhibitions of local artists as well as touring shows, held free lectures and films, offered classes in painting, drawing, sculpture, and crafts, and provided rooms for clubs and political rallies.34 These centers provided a place for artists to share their ideas and were some of the few places in conservative areas where modernism was encouraged. The establishment of such centers was a way of spreading ideas in art to the areas of the country which did not have as much contact with the artistic centers on the East Coast as well as to promote local artists. These art centers fostered a friendly environment in which modern artists could work, which was important in regions such as Utah where new ideas were still not received with much enthusiasm.

Utah’s Artistic Climate in the Early Twentieth Century

Utah has always had a way of doing things differently than the rest of the country. This is in part a result of the religious culture of its inhabitants which is inclined to be conservative and can create a roadblock for ideas which are less traditional.35 When the Mormon pioneers (or the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) first came to the Utah Territory in

32 Ibid, 15.
the 1840s they wanted to separate themselves from the rest of the country. As a result, the physical distance between the population of Utah and the rest of the country created a social and cultural distance. This separation came about because the Mormon settlers of the West saw themselves as different and peculiar. However, with the territory’s first attempt to join the Union as a state in the 1850s and to be accepted by the rest of the nation, the residents of Utah territory desired to look and act more like the rest of the country.36

Eventually the gap between Utah and the other parts of the country shrunk due to the forces of civilization and industry. Innovations such as the railroad beginning in 1869, and later the telephone allowed people to move from one part of the country to another with more ease and affordability.37 As more people came west in the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century there was more interaction between the more urban East and the West. This allowed people from other parts of the country to realize that Utah was not completely backwards when it came to culture. Many visitors were impressed with Utah’s own strong culture of theater and other arts.38 The more frequent interaction between the western states in America and the East Coast allowed for an emergence of modernist ideas into Utah.

Despite the fact that Utah has lagged behind at times, the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as well as community leaders including Alice Horne, continued to support the arts. Throughout the history of Utah there were individuals who knew and assimilated modernist styles in the broader sense into their art. Even as early as the 1890s Utah artists traveled to Europe to learn how to paint in the manner of the Europeans. Sending artists to Europe to study shows the region’s desire for continued cultural advancement. In 1892 the

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
LDS Church sent four Utah artists, including John Hafen, to the Academie Julian in Paris as missionaries to gain the artistic skills that were necessary in order to decorate the interior of the new temple in Salt Lake City. As the Academie Julian, which at the time had a reputation of being modern, these artists were instructed by men such as Jules Lefebvre, Jean Paul Laurents, and Benjamin Constant. As these artists studied the academic style they came in contact with other modern styles including Impressionism which broke away from the academic training by painting outdoors, not in studios and depicting scenes of everyday life, not only scenes from history or literature. From Impressionism these artists also learned to paint with a quick brushstroke and learned not to pay as much attention to complex detail in forms and figures.

There were other Utah artists studying in Paris around the same time who were not missionaries, including James Taylor Harwood. When he arrived in Paris in 1888, Harwood began his studies at the Academie Julian and like most students there painted in the French academic style that stressed the copying of plaster casts and works of the old masters. Harwood’s *Preparation for Dinner* [Fig. 3] is an excellent example that showcases this academic training. This particular painting was exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1891, and won a medal, making Harwood the first Utah artist to have a painting exhibited in the prestigious Salon. Although he was instructed in the academic style, Harwood, like so many of the young American artists studying in Paris at the time, was introduced to and influenced by the different styles of many artists. All of these styles and artists excited Harwood but he eventually gravitated towards Impressionism, the style that he preferred throughout the remainder of his career. Although Impressionism was no longer considered new at the time Harwood was in Paris, it was

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introduced twenty years earlier in 1873, it continued to influence the artists and foster new ideas about painting which would continue throughout Europe into the twentieth century.

Following the generation of Harwood and Hafen there were other young artists from Utah who traveled to New York and Paris and became influenced by different styles of art. After being exposed to new ideas in Europe, artists including Mahonri Young, Henri Moser and Frank Zimbeaux returned to Utah and began incorporating modern techniques into their work. Young spent the most important years in his artistic development in Paris and New York around the turn of the twentieth century. Young traveled to New York just as the city was becoming the cultural Mecca for young artists. Here he was exposed to the modern European styles as well as the modern Realism of the Ash Can School while he studied at the Art Students League of New York for eight months even though he studied under the conservative teachings of Kenyon Cox and George B. Bridgeman. Despite Young’s exposure to the Ash Can School and modern ideas, he never completely immersed himself in European modernism although he did incorporate some modern elements into his sculpture after being influenced by the work of Rodin. Like many artist, he realized that modernism was important and that it challenged the basic concepts of art which would have long term effects.

In addition to Young, Henri Moser and Frank Zimbeaux also incorporated new modern ideas into their work. Moser spent two years in France between 1909 and 1911. While in France Moser became friends with the artist Frank Zimbeaux, a Pittsburg native who later moved to

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42 Thomas E. Toone, Mahonri Young: His Life and Art (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1997), 35. After his study at the Art Students League, Young went to Paris for four years. It was while Young was in Paris that he decided to switch to sculpture. Young returned to New York in 1912 and became a member of the Association of America Painters and Sculptors which was involved in the Armory Show in 1913. Young even had one of his sculptures The Coal Carrier featured in the Armory Show.
43 Ibid, 41.
Utah. He and Moser had similar artistic ideas, although his aesthetic was slightly darker than Moser’s. In France, once he became acquainted with Matisse and other great artists of the time, Zimbeaux turned away from the academic training he had received in favor of more modern styles.\textsuperscript{45} It is most likely through Zimbeaux that Moser was introduced to the Fauvist work of Matisse, a style with which Moser became interested in and continued to use in his work throughout his career in Utah.\textsuperscript{46} Certain modern elements, including the use of bold intense colors, can be seen in Moser’s painting \textit{Fauvist Autumn} \textsuperscript{47} Zimbeaux also introduced Moser to the Cubist work of Picasso. Through their exposure to modernism Zimbeaux and Moser developed modern elements in their art and brought them back to Utah.

Many Utah artists who were introduced to modern art during this time still found themselves anchored to a conservative tradition of art, incorporating only a few elements of modernism into their work. The preferred style of art was the naturalistic, or one that imitated nature – subject matter that people recognized and could relate to. However, exposure to modernism continued to influence Utah artists. In the 1920s and up through the Depression more and more Utah artists studied in Paris and New York and returned to Utah with modern inclinations in their work.

With the increased travel and interest in European modernism between the wars, along with the establishment of the WPA and its Community Art Center program, the next generation of modern artists in Utah had begun to create modern art by the end of the 1930s. During this period there were several art instructors at universities and colleges throughout the state who encouraged a more progressive style. Many of these instructors taught at the University of Utah.

\textsuperscript{45} Robert S. Oplin, \textit{Dictionary of Utah Art} (Salt Lake City, UT: Salt Lake Art Center, 1980), 293.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
as well as the Utah State Agricultural College (USAC) which later became Utah State University.\textsuperscript{48}

One of these progressive instructors was Mabel Frazer, a Utah native and an instructor at the University of Utah. She was one of the strongest advocates of modern art in the state. Before returning to Utah to teach in 1921, she studied art at three different New York schools: the Art Students League, the School of Industrial Art, and the Beaux Art Institute of Design.\textsuperscript{49} She was a teacher who challenged her students, and many of them including Dibble admired her work and teaching method.\textsuperscript{50} She also encouraged an easy and free approach to art in general which helped foster creative style among her students. Frazer was considered a modernist by her colleagues, and there were a number of people who did not appreciate her modern approach, including her colleague LeConte Stewart.\textsuperscript{51} Despite the criticism, Frazer helped direct the next generation of Utah artists toward a more forward thinking approach to art through her modern leanings and teaching method throughout the decade of the 1920s.

After the stock market crash in 1929 and during the Great Depression, federally funded art projects were created in Utah. In 1935 the WPA and other programs such as the Treasury Relief Art Project allowed artists, like Gordon Cope, Bill Parkinson and Henry Rasmussen, to remain in Utah by hiring them to create murals and exhibits in communities throughout the state.\textsuperscript{52} Employment through these programs was important because not only did it give these men an opportunity to earn a paycheck, it allowed them to continue to be artists while earning

\textsuperscript{48} Thomas Moyle Alder, “Pathway to Color: The Art and Life of Henri Moser”, 25. Henri Moser went to Paris with the financial help of John A. Widstoe who was the president of Utah State Agricultural College in Logan. Widstoe paid for Moser’s studies on condition that Moser would teach for a minimum of one year at USAC on his return, a promise which Moser kept.

\textsuperscript{49} Robert S. Olpin et al., \textit{Utah Art, Utah Artists: 150 Year Survey} (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2001), 45.

\textsuperscript{50} Olpin, \textit{Utah Art}, 120.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Utah: A Guide to the State}, 169.
their pay. According to scholar Jonathan Harris, some artists said they earned more while employed by the WPA than what they earned previously as independent artists. Many of these artists were hired to paint scenes representing Utah, its history and culture during the 1930s.

Gordon Cope captured Utah’s landscape in a flattened out style with little detail or shading. Rasmussen, a modernist, was hired by the WPA as a collaborator for the Utah State Capitol Rotunda and the Barrier Canyon project reproducing Native American art in mural form for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Thus the WPA helped support and spread modern art in Utah by means of hiring modernists like Rasmussen and Parkinson for projects around the state in which they applied modern elements and techniques.

Not all Utah artists in the 1930s were employed by the WPA, but many were influenced by styles which emerged from federal projects. Some Utah artists such as LeConte Stewart, were aware of modern styles, but preferred to keep their subject matter consistent with ordinary life in America, or the American Scene. He painted naturalistic landscapes of farms and rural communities in Utah at a time when modernists were simplifying forms, using semi-abstraction and experimenting with perspective. He was a supporter of American art, particularly the American Scene, but not European modernism. Believing that the American Scene had the substance of real art, Stewart said in his personal writings “There is one movement in American art which seems to come from the soil, rather than the studio atmosphere, that is the American Scene.” Stewart also believed that American Scene art was purely American in subject and expression because it portrayed the land and people of America. During the 1920s he chose not

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53 Harris, 15.
54 Ibid, 26.
55 Robert S. Olpin et al., Utah Art, Utah Artists, 85.
56 LeConte Stewart, LeConte Stewart Papers, Special Collection Department, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.
to follow the path of European training in the modern style.\textsuperscript{57} Stewart did not study in Europe instead he studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art as well as the Art Students League.\textsuperscript{58} Even though Stewart was in New York in 1913 and visited the Armory Show, he was not particularly impressed by the modern European styles he saw. Perhaps at the time he thought that European styles were too radical because of the difference between the modern and traditional visual elements such as color and line, and because of the new ideas behind modernism.\textsuperscript{59}

Although Stewart preferred a traditional approach to painting over a modern one, occasionally he employed modernist elements in his work. During the Depression he experimented with the flattening of objects and the simplification of the foreground in many of his paintings. Even though Stewart was aware of modernism through his association with Mable Frazer and other artists returning to Utah from their studies, he chose to remain a conservative painter in general. Although Stewart was not a modernist, he made a great contribution to Utah art throughout his career as an artist as well as an instructor. His depictions of rural beauty, traditional subject matter, conservative color scheme and representational form reflect his conservative style with the use of conservative colors, accurate perspective, and impressionistic brushwork.\textsuperscript{60} This is the type of art that the people of Utah wanted; it was traditional, conservative, and had recognizable content. There was a tradition of conservative landscapes in Utah, as seen in the work of Harwood and Hafen. The works of these artists contained content that the Utah public could relate to, much more than radical European styles or forms.

\textsuperscript{57} Opin, \textit{Utah Art}, 120.
\textsuperscript{58} Donna Poulton, interview by author, Salt Lake City, UT, March 9, 2012.
\textsuperscript{59}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60}Robert S. Olpin et al., \textit{Utah Art, Utah Artists}, 48.
During the 1930s Stewart worked in Salt Lake City which was traditionally considered the center of art in Utah. Throughout the city there were institutions that welcomed both conservative and modern art ideas. The University of Utah was one of these institutions. Another institution which fostered an interest of modern art in Utah was the Art Barn. In 1931, the Art Barn was established in Salt Lake City by Alta Rawlins Jensen and others as a permanent art center where artists could meet to discuss ideas, and to share their work with the public.61 Within a few years of its founding, the Art Barn also became a place where progressive styles were encouraged and was one of only a few institutions in Utah where modern art was exhibited on a regular basis. In a conservative artistic climate, institutions such as the Art Barn took part in the slow turn of the public acceptance toward modern ideas in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

On July 3, 1932, the first exhibit opened at the Art Barn which featured the work of John Hafen.62 Four years later the Art Barn began to show more diverse styles of art which challenged the public’s idea of what art should be. In 1936 a somewhat controversial exhibition, for example, featured the work of Mexican artist Diego Rivera.63 One reason that this particular exhibit was a challenge to the public in a conservative community such as Utah was the fact that Rivera had Communist ties and was known to be involved with Communist and Marxists ideas, as many artists in America during the 1930s were affiliated with Communist and Labor groups.64 This caused controversy in many parts of the country because Communism was seen as un-American and a threat to the American way of life.65 One year later surrealist works by Rivera’s

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61 The Art Barn was located close to the University of Utah until the 1970s when it moved downtown and became the Salt Lake Art Center. Due to its close proximity to the university it became a gathering place for art students and artists.
62 Will South, Making and Breaking Tradition: The History of the Salt Lake Arts Center (Salt Lake City, UT: Salt Lake Art Center, 1991), 3.
63 Ibid, 10.
64 Doss, 102.
65 Harris, 15.
wife, Frida Kahlo, were also exhibited at the Art Barn. Kahlo’s paintings were probably more challenging to the taste of the public since her works were more shocking and confusing to people who did not understand the meaning behind her art.\textsuperscript{66} By displaying the works of Rivera and Kahlo, the Art Barn proved that it was willing to accept newer and more challenging work for the public to understand.

Although there were pockets of support for modernism in Utah, in general when it came to new and innovative ideas in art, Utah lagged behind. In 1934 in speaking of this cultural lag, Alta Jensen stated:

> It is time to find out if Utah is a bit of a backwash, remote from the main current in progress or if culture here has grown to maturity, where truth and beauty can be seen in the nude as well as in other art. We will never develop any art that is real or great in Utah until art can be anything it wants to be.\textsuperscript{67}

Jensen felt that Utah could not mature artistically or culturally until all forms and styles of art found acceptance within the state. She argued that beauty could be found in all forms of art including modern art, and that progress was a sign of cultural maturity. When art in Utah gained the freedom to be anything, great art would come from it. Clearly Jensen hoped that sharing fresh contemporary art from around the world would help the people of Utah broaden their understanding of modern art. Until new trends could be accepted in Utah, art in the region would be stagnant and would make it difficult for those like Dibble who wanted to push the new.

\textsuperscript{66} Will South, \textit{Making and Breaking of Tradition}, 10.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid. This statement could also be used as an argument for abstract work which was to come later in the 1940s and 1950s, hoping to ease the anxiety of the public who were disconcerted with the modern art which was being offered to them.
The Impact of George Dibble’s Work in Utah

Officially George Dibble began his formal studies at the University of Utah in the 1920s, but there was already an artistic legacy established in Dibble’s family. His great-grandfather Philo Dibble, Sr. had the idea in the late nineteenth century of creating a fine art museum to benefit the Mormon people. His idea eventually developed into the Springville Museum of Art in 1903, eight years after his death.68 George Dibble was born in 1904 in Laie, Hawaii and spent his childhood on the family farm in Layton, Utah. Dibble’s mother was also an artist and was his first instructor when he was a child.69

As a teenager Dibble continued his art instruction when he signed up for a correspondence course with William L. Evans, a cartoonist and caricaturist in Cleveland, Ohio.70 During his teenage years and throughout college Dibble continued to draw and paint. He studied to be a teacher at the University of Utah, and after receiving a teaching certificate in 1926 he taught elementary school for two years. In 1928 Dibble returned to the University of Utah to study art and took classes from various instructors including Frazer suggesting that he was at least introduced to modernism early on in his studies.71 There was one teacher, however, that Dibble tried to avoid at the university – J.T. Harwood. For Dibble, Harwood was “too much of a realist and academically inclined who made his students imitate him.”72 Frazer and Harwood represented two different paths for Dibble. Not surprisingly he chose the more difficult route by following Frazer and the idea of modern art. With these two competing ideas in art, Dibble’s

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68 Olpin, *Utah Art*, 137, 238. This museum is significant because it features the work of Utah artists and allows students in public schools the opportunity to see art and gain appreciation for it.
69 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
choice to study with Frazer suggests that he already felt the need to approach the learning of art in a different way.

In 1929 after teaching elementary school and studying art in Utah for three years, George Dibble went to New York to study at the Art Students League. Through the artistic freedom of the school and its instructors, he became acquainted with the full spectrum of modern art. The instructors at the Art Students League had complete freedom in creating their own curriculum during the 1930s. There was no prescribed method of instruction or courses of study, which allowed the instructors to teach how and what they wished. The League’s open curriculum kept pace with the changing concepts of art and art education of the time and the instructors were practicing artists who were selected for the contributions they had made to contemporary art. 73 While at the Art Students League, Dibble took classes from several instructors such as Ivan Olinksy, a portraitist who used minimalist designs, and Howard Giles, an avid Cubist. Through the instruction of Giles, Dibble was introduced to and enthralled by Cubism. Even though the style was more than two decades old at that point, it was new and exciting to him. While in New York Dibble also took advantage of what the city had to offer and visited museums and galleries where he saw the works of early modernists. Clearly the one that left the greatest impression on him was the Post-Impressionist Paul Cezanne.74

In 1935 George Dibble transferred his credit from the Art Students League to Columbia University where he received his Bachelors of Fine Arts and went on to earn his Master of Fine Arts in 1940. During the 1930s Dibble returned to Utah several times to earn money to continue his education. On his return visits he taught in the Murray School District. As he traveled

73 Landgren, 98.
between New York and Utah, Dibble realized that there was a difference in how modern art was accepted in the two places. This realization prompted in him a desire to work for the acceptance of modern art back home. In 1940 Dibble returned permanently to Utah with the knowledge that he was returning to an environment that was unreceptive to current trends in art. He knew and saw what was happening in the visual arts and that art was heading towards a more modern direction. Dibble also knew that Utah lagged behind in its progression in the visual arts, and despite the fact that he was a gentle and soft spoken man, he was persistent and worked hard for what he believed was a worthy cause. He was determined to make a difference and to help generate a new perception and appreciation for progressive art in the state. He also desired to help narrow the gap between what was happening on the East Coast and Utah and felt it necessary to help make Utah aware of the modern trends. He was not the only artist who had this desire. Other such as Bill Parkinson, Henry Rasmussen, and art instructors around the state like Calvin Fletcher, the head of the art department at USAC, wanted to cultivate a more progressive outlook to the art in the region. These artists and instructors knew that the state was behind other places when it came to modern trends of art. People like Fletcher believed that to be accepted as part of mainstream America, Utah needed to accept modern art. These artists wanted Utah to be in tune with and more open to what was happening in other cultural centers like New York.

Although Dibble saw modern art as important and necessary, other people did not accept his point of view. Despite his enthusiasm for modern art, Dibble discovered that not everyone in Utah liked or accepted it. Modern art was new to a region that may have been steps behind other regions of the nation. Most people did not even see modern art as art or understand it. The Utah public could not relate to modern art because they had not been taught about it or how to view it. It might have been said that audiences in Utah preferred John Hafen to Picasso. They wanted
naturalistic landscapes, scenes of daily life, and objects that were representational and recognizable. Thus, conservative and academic artists were more successful in Utah during the 1930s. Many of the avant-garde artists of the time fought against the public’s view of modern art as something which was not high culture, when perhaps if they had a little education on modern art they would have viewed it as high culture. Later in life when speaking of the opposing view of critics, Dibble explained “Some points of view are not always well received or popular, not always loved or accepted.”\textsuperscript{75} In Utah at this time the new ideas regarding the differences between traditional art and modern art were not as accessible to the public, thus helping create a lack of enthusiasm for modern art.

Dibble’s modern sensibilities earned negative criticism even before his permanent return to Utah. In 1938 Dibble painted a work entitled \textit{Pay Dirt}[[Fig. 5]] which won a purchase award in the Utah State art show that same year. It was Dibble’s treatment of the human form and his experimental use of perspective that drew negative criticism from critics. The subject matter of this painting resembles that of the WPA or the American Scene. It is a representation of everyday life, in which workers carve out a living in what appears to be a mine or an industrial site. The title of this painting suggests a source of wealth or something profitable, given that the definition of the phrase “pay dirt” is soil or ore that can be mined for profit. However, Dibble’s painting focused more on style and form than the content. The figures are faceless, simplified and abstracted. The bestowal of the purchase award on \textit{Pay Dirt} demonstrated that despite the criticism of modern art, there were some who did appreciate it.\textsuperscript{76} Although it was included in the state collection, some state workers were not pleased with the modernist qualities of the work.

\textsuperscript{75} Dibble, “History of Modern art in Utah” DVD of a lecture given at the Salt Lake Art Center in 1985.
\textsuperscript{76} At the turn of the twentieth century, Alice Horne helped pass legislation that would help support the arts in Utah. The legislation required the State of Utah to purchase one work of art a year to build the state’s collection of art by local artists. The purchase award discussed in connection to Dibble’s painting \textit{Pay Dirt} refers to this purchase by the state.
Perhaps this was because it was different and there was a fear of the unknown. Dibble later recalled that while the painting was in the state collection, Cornelius Salisbury, an artist and instructor who was also an acquaintance, took *Pay Dirt* to “clean” it. Salisbury got a hold of the painting and scrubbed it with a wire brush in hopes to destroy it, as Dibble believed.\(^{77}\) Part of the painting’s color was taken off in the process and the damage is still visible. Dibble was given the option to repair it, but seems not to have done it. Perhaps he felt that the damage to the painting was a visual part of the struggle for modern art in Utah and should remain to tell the story of the struggle.

After his permanent returned to Utah in 1940, another event occurred which further demonstrated how unfavorable modern art was in Utah and illustrated how bound Dibble was to new ideas in the visual arts. Once again Dibble tried to gain acceptance for modern art by entering a highly Cubist work entitled *Long Island Sound*\(^{[Fig.6]}\) into the Utah State Fair in 1940. This particular painting had won honors at an intercollegiate show in New York while he was a student at Columbia University. Compared to this painting, *Pay Dirt* did not appear so extreme. *Long Island Sound* is far more abstract and more geometric although it is not completely void of representational form. With *Long Island Sound* it seems as if Dibble tried to push modernism even further and perhaps challenge the system even more. This was something which he could do in New York and still be accepted, but not in Utah. Dibble said that this work is a reference to a seascape “in the most extreme sense”, implying that the painting is not an actual representation of a place, but it is the Sound as Dibble perceived it. He painted the Sound in an extreme sense by using semi-abstract forms to express what he saw in his own mind.\(^{78}\) The patch of dark blue in the lower right hand corner of the painting is the only indication of the

\(^{77}\) George Dibble, personal stories, personal archives.

\(^{78}\) Olpin, *Utah Art*, 139.
water. Other recognizable elements of a seascape are various geometric shapes such as the
triangles, which make up the sailboats and the yellow half circle representing the sun, eluding to
the idea that life can be abstract. This painting illustrates once again the importance of form over
content which was the focus of Dibble’s work along with the importance of experimentation with
forms and perspective. Although Long Island Sound was popular in New York, once it arrived in
Utah it faced the challenges of acceptance.79

After entering this painting in the Utah State fair, Dibble returned to see the exhibit.
Upon viewing the show, he discovered that his work was accepted and won a cash prize. He also
discovered that it had been moved to the amateur section of the exhibition. When he investigated
the reason for what he viewed as a demotion, he was told by the jury that his highly modern style
was not considered to be professional art. Dibble was never given a reason why it was not
considered professional, but perhaps the painting was not considered on the same level as the
professionals because it was not academic or painterly enough, or perhaps it is because modern
art is constantly criticized as easy and simple craft. This is most likely due to the semi-abstract
and almost non-representational forms found in the painting, which people could not
immediately discern what was represented. Understandably upset, Dibble fought the decision of
the jury and eventually his painting was moved back to its original place in the professional
category, but the cash prize was taken away. The jury’s decision clearly implied that modern art
was not considered professional quality.80 The irony of this event is that although this particular
painting was accepted and liked by his peers and teachers in New York, it was not received
favorably in Utah.81

80 Ibid.
81 Olpin, Utah Art, 139.
Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Utah State Fair commission handed out dual awards for traditional painting and modern painting at the State Fair.\textsuperscript{82} This shows the uneasiness regarding modern art which continued throughout much of the public. The idea of two separate categories in the prestigious state visual art competitions was the primary grievance for Utah’s modernists. Dibble’s persistence in continuing to enter his work in competitions demonstrated his desire to get his work out in the public eye and to challenge the conservative circles that dominated Utah’s market.

The incident at the state fair in the early 1940s illustrates the level of negative criticism and prejudice faced by artists who favored modern art. It was not just the works of art that were being criticized and ridiculed, but it was also the ideas of the movement and the artists themselves. The group of critics, which included fellow artists, members of juries for exhibits, and people who held positions of power in the Universities, was conservative and clearly partisan against modern art. This circle of critics belittled these new and less familiar art forms by claiming that modern works of art “were laboratory experiments and that they destroyed and debased art.”\textsuperscript{83} This company included B. F. Larsen, head of the art department at Brigham Young University, LeConte Stewart who was head of the art department at the University of Utah, and Avard Fairbanks a successful sculptor who created numerous commissions for the LDS Church. A few critics even went as far as to label Dibble and his fellow modern artists Communists. B.F. Larsen was a traditional landscape painter and one of the last artists from Utah to study and gain academic training in Paris.\textsuperscript{84} He was not sympathetic towards modernist trends and even warned Dibble that modern art was a Communist movement. In addition, Larsen told

\textsuperscript{83} Arvard Fairbanks, as quoted in George Dibble, “History of Modern Art” DVD.
\textsuperscript{84} Robert S. Olpin et al., \textit{Utah Art, Utah Artists}, 44.
Dibble that if he continued down this path his modern work would lead him into the Communist camp, although it never did. During the 1940s this was a common insult to modern artists. As Karal Marling has pointed out, “Calling someone a modernist was tantamount to calling him a communist, un-American, or ‘Red’.” This was due in large part to the fact that many artists during the 1940s in more urban areas were affiliated with Communist groups, such as Ben Shahn and Reginald Marsh. Although there were some modern artists who had Communist ties, Dibble did not. The accusation of being a Communist was particularly dangerous in Utah because of the conservative and patriotic nature of the public as well as the religious nature of Utah, and the fact that at the time the political nature of Utah, as in most places, was very conservative. Even with this negative reaction to their art, many of these artists continued on producing and encouraging what was considered radical and possibly even un-American art.

Although there were some critics and members of the public who did not think highly of modern art, a few institutions supported it. These institutions encouraged artists like Dibble to produce modern art and assisted in the dissemination of modern ideas. These organizations believed that it was important to familiarize the public with unfamiliar forms of art to help bring the state to an understanding of what was happening in other parts of the country. The Utah State Art Center in Salt Lake City was established in 1938 and was part of the New Deal’s Community Art Center program. This center sought to circulate art to the people of Utah and to eliminate the belief that art was only for the elite. The State Art Center brought traveling exhibitions of contemporary character to Utah as well as held exhibitions of talented local sculptors and artists

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86 Marling, 24.
87 Harris, 44.
like Bill Parkinson, Henry Rasmussen, and Calvin Fletcher. The State Art Center also held an exhibition in 1941 of George Dibble’s oils and watercolors.88

Beyond the Utah State Art Center in Salt Lake City there were other centers that fostered a broader approach to the visual arts during the 1930s and 1940s. Many advocates of modern art in Utah were found at the USAC in Logan. In Logan art professor and Utah native Floyd V. Cornaby, believed that there should be a balance between the more traditional conservative art of the styles of the past and the color, abstraction, form, and content of modern art. He thought that an instructor should not have a prejudice against one style of art, but should encourage all types. He believed that it was the encouragement of individuals and institutions in addition to the perseverance of the artists which would help the modern art movement gain a foothold in Utah.89 Although there were opportunities for modern art in Salt Lake City, Logan appeared to be more open to allow artists to pursue modern art. Perhaps the reason for this was due to the distance between the two cities giving Logan a sense of freedom from the conservative control of Salt Lake.

One of the biggest supporters of progressive art was Calvin Fletcher. He was the head of the art department at USAC and it has been suggested that he was the only art department chair in Utah during the 1940s who accepted modern art.90 As head of the art department, Fletcher made the decision to make the school more artistically progressive by hiring young artists to teach the summer sessions. The first instructor he hired in 1928 was Birger Sandzen from Kansas, an early modernist who used Fauvist colors and painted with thick impasto.91 This

88 Burke, 15-16. The Utah Art Center was renamed the War Services Center in 1942. In January of 1943 the WPA discontinued financial assistance and when the lease on the building could not be renewed, the Center close in 1943. 89 Fjeldsted, Margaret. “USAC Professor Champions Moderns, Conservatives.” The Salt Lake Tribune June 6, 1954. 90 Olpin, George Dibble: Painter – Teacher – Critic, 14-15. 91 Olpin, Utah Art, 118.
program not only helped these artists to gain recognition in Utah, but also helped the students attending USAC to open their minds to new ideas.\textsuperscript{92} Fletcher was also a supporter of Dibble and invited him to teach for the summer of 1941. Later Dibble was offered a permanent job at the college which he turned down in favor of a teaching job at the University of Utah, both of which were great offers for a young artist. The jobs offered to Dibble demonstrates that he and his work were gaining recognition throughout the state, even though there were some people who did not support his work. It also shows that there were many who believed that what Dibble was doing was important.

Despite various efforts to support and encourage modern art, modern artists were still facing obstacles. In reference to the acceptance of modern art in New York and the challenge of establishing it in Utah, Alice Horne said in 1939, “The fault lies in the fact that the different sections of the country have not had a chance to become familiar with art generally and with their native sons particularly.”\textsuperscript{93} The public’s unfamiliarity with modern art came from the lack of knowledge of what artists were doing in the 1940s in New York and other art centers of the country. It also was not familiar with the work of young artists returning home from New York. This unfamiliarity with the forms, colors, and ideas in modern art is one reason for the struggle that many of the modernists were involved in during this time. In regards to the rejection of new art in Utah Ann Poore stated: “Some people when confronted with the void an abstract painting can create, want to fill it with words. They want an answer about what they are seeing and may be uncomfortable to learn that there isn’t one.”\textsuperscript{94} The people wanted art that had recognizable content; they did not care about ideas or the reasoning behind the creation of art.

\textsuperscript{92} Olpin, \textit{Utah Art, Utah Artists}, 44.
\textsuperscript{93} Olpin, \textit{Waldo Midgley: Birds, Animals, People, Things} (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Museum of Fine Art, 1984), 69.
\textsuperscript{94} Poore, \textit{The Reality of Abstraction}, 3.
Even with the support of various establishments throughout Utah, in 1941 there arose a need among young artists like Dibble to help the people in the state recognize that there were more than two kinds of art: good and modern.\textsuperscript{95} In order to help fill this need in that same year, Don Goodall, director of the Utah State Art Center, gathered together a group of artists, including Dibble and Fletcher, at the Art Barn to create a document which came to be known as the “Modern Art Manifesto.” The document grew out of casual discussions and seminars among artists and was eventually developed into a formal outline of the philosophy and aims of the modern art movement in Utah. There was an exhibition created as well at the Utah State Art Center in January of 1942 to illustrate the ideas within the “Manifesto.”\textsuperscript{96} The group that drafted and signed this document was made up of nine artists: Don Goodall, George Dibble, Calvin Fletcher, Irene Fletcher, Harry Reynolds, Henry N. Rasmussen, Millard Malin, Alberta Kondratieff and Leone Eitel.\textsuperscript{97} Certain individuals in this group, such as Rasmussen and Dibble, had already experienced the censorship and heated criticism of the public for their work. Rasmussen experienced censorship when one of his paintings was removed from the annual Utah Arts Council exhibit in 1941 because it was not conservative enough.\textsuperscript{98} Rasmussen and Dibble along with the others wanted the public of Utah to know what they were trying to achieve through their fresh new work. The aim of the “Manifesto” was to familiarize the public with what these artists were doing in a community which could be hostile to their work and ideas.

\textsuperscript{95} Olpin, \textit{Utah Art}, 140.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} The signers of the “Manifesto” were all Utah artists. Some are better known than others such as Calvin Fletcher who was at USAC, Don Goodall director of the Utah State Art Center, George Dibble (artist teacher, and writer) and Henry Rasmussen who was an early modern artist in Utah. The other five signers were lesser known, but had an impact on the bringing modern art to the attention to the public such as Alberta Kondratieff who had some of her works exhibited at the Utah State Art Center in February of 1942 along with works by Calvin Fletcher. Irene Fletcher was an artist and the wife of Calvin Fletcher. She had a one woman show at the Logan Public Library in 1940 and won the purchase award at the Utah Institute of Fine Arts Exhibition in 1947. Harry Reynolds was an associate of Calvin Fletchers at USAC and was behind the schools more liberalized approach to art. Finally, Millard Malin was a prominent Utah sculptor who created sculpture for various LDS temples.
At the time, this document was considered to be revolutionary in Utah because the ideas found in the “Manifesto” were still new to the region. It was also considered radical because never before had a group of Utah artists formally compiled a document in support of modern art. Although the ideas in the “Manifesto” were avant-garde in Utah, compared to similar types of documents written on the East Coast earlier it appeared quite tame and in reality its ideas were old elsewhere. The “Manifesto” was designed to explain to the public the objectives of the artists who wrote the document and in essence, was a counter attack on the critics who were criticizing the work of the modernists. The document was prefaced with a statement that the modern artist “does not attempt to reproduce the photographic or surface appearance of things.” In other words, the modern artist was more concerned with creating beauty by expressing the essence or the feeling of the painting, not so much with making an actual or exact representation of the objects in the work. The document continued by setting down four guiding principles in their work. The modern artist, it stated:

1. Uses individually conceived forms to express his aesthetic ideas and emotions, in terms of the particular medium employed.  
2. Employs the design element contained in plastic form, including relationships of line, tone, space, planes, texture, color, and subject matter.  
3. Uses conventional and intellectual freedom in organizing the subject matter into unified form.  
4. Respects the validity of the picture field. The picture field is composed of front, back and side planes, determined by the artist.  

These artists knew that Manifestos were an important part of the modernist tradition. The creation of this particular document was also a way of disseminating ideas and theories to a large number of people. With its emphasis on individually conceived forms, the “Manifesto” was important to the spread of modern art in Utah, because it helped establish the idea that artists do

99 Ibid.  
100 Olpin, Utah Art, 140.
not need to use the traditional or conventional forms and lines to express what they are feeling or to show what they are visualizing.

Dibble’s work *Long Island Sound* is indicative of the idea that artists do not need to follow traditional paths to express themselves, as well as other points of the “Manifesto.” In this painting there is freedom of organization which allows the shapes to be arranged in Dibble’s own determined way to represent the location of Long Island Sound as he visualized it, not as it appeared in reality. It also illustrates the point that the artist can use all of the different parts of the picture plane to his or her own advantage. This particular painting illustrates the point that the modern artist uses conventional and intellectual freedom to organize the composition into a unified form because Dibble was more concerned with the form and the technique than with the actual subject matter of the composition. *Long Island Sound* also shows the fact that even though Dibble organized his forms in a non-conventional way, there is still a relationship between the lines, space, and color which creates a harmonious composition.

In 1941, the same year as the “Manifesto,” an exhibit was held at the Utah Art Center, which was considered the region’s first abstract art show that featured local artists.101 Featured in this exhibit were the works of George Dibble and Bill Parkinson. Parkinson worked during the Depression for the WPA and by the 1940s his art had begun to take on a more mystical and surreal appearance as seen in his painting *Within the Ancient Underground Temple of Oude* [Fig.7]. In this painting there are also Cubist elements such as the fracturing of the picture plane and the conflation of the back, middle, and foreground. His work became more abstract as he progressed in his career, similar to that of Joan Miro.102 Dibble’s art, by contrast, continued to

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102 Olpin, *Utah Art*, 186.
incorporate certain modernist elements such as perspective and line, but in general stayed away from complete abstraction. This exhibit was significant because it presented a complete exhibition of modern art to the public and it demonstrated to modern artists that their art could eventually be accepted in such a conservative region. This particular exhibit also helped spread the ideas and goals outlined in the “Manifesto” by showing the public what modern artists hoped to achieve with their art.

In spite of the negative criticism, during the 1940s Dibble and his fellow modern artists continued to paint. They did not let the fact that people were neither comfortable with nor wanted this different type of art deter them. They were determined to expose and educate the public about new forms of art and to attempt to bring Utah up to date with modern art. However, in the 1940s Dibble was no longer a student but an art instructor. During this time Dibble taught at the University of Utah alongside LeConte Stewart, the department chair and one of Dibble’s most ardent critics. In his new situation Dibble needed to be careful and find new ways to push for an acceptance of modernism. In order to gain tenure, he had to go through Stewart and must have thought it necessary to keep his work more in line with the conservative taste of Stewart and other faculty members. As a result, in the 1940s the majority of Dibble’s works were more conservative in appearance but with subtle, modernist elements. Perhaps another reason for Dibble’s more conservative style is that to be able to sell in the market for art in Utah it needed to be more traditional. This illustrates the point that many artists’ need to support a family was stronger than their ideals.

An example of Dibble’s more conservative phase is his Mount Olympus (Fig. 8). Dibble and other modernists never strayed from landscapes; they just presented landscapes using modern methods. This particular painting is one that Stewart admired, telling Dibble, “Now that
is a damn good painting.”103 Compared to Stewart’s landscapes such as *Springtime in Peterson* [Fig. 9], Dibble’s landscape at a second look is not as conservative as it appears. Dibble still found a way of incorporating elements of modern art into his painting. However the painting was conservative enough that it was acceptable to Stewart and the general public. The colors are realistic and are what one would find in spring. The lines of the mountain are not painted as naturalistic as they could be, showing that Dibble applied his personal expression to capture the essence of the mountain. Dibble’s painting has Cezannesque brush strokes which are visibly thicker, quicker and blockier. The mountain in Dibble’s *Mount Olympus* has been simplified somewhat, following Cezanne’s idea called “passage”, reducing all forms to basic geometric shapes like the cylinder, cone, and sphere.104 Stewart’s landscape is filled with detail and more Impressionistic whereas Dibble’s mountain, like a Cezanne’s landscape, is more of an expression of color and form which trumps detail.105

It was also during what might be his so-called “conservative period” that George Dibble began to turn more towards watercolors. During the later part of the 1940s he practically abandoned oil painting for watercolors as he worked to master the medium. He did occasionally paint oil paintings throughout his career, but watercolor was the medium he preferred. Dibble chose watercolor because it was a method that allowed for personal expression as embodied in the “Manifesto,” of anything “from a whimsical mood to feelings of danger” and had a tendency to create abstraction more than other mediums.106 Painting with watercolors requires a fluid motion and a freedom of movement. Personal expression was an important modernist idea but this is not what people wanted to see in Utah; they wanted to see objects and figures, not

103 George Dibble, personal history, personal archives.
thoughts or emotions. Dibble said of his preferred method of painting: “Watercolor is an episode. Like poetry, it’s uttered, said properly, or not at all. There is a sort of virtuosity there. It’s got to go. With oil it’s different. I’ve stayed with transparent watercolor because of the interaction of water with paint and paper.”

He believed that watercolor has a lyrical quality to it. Even though watercolor can be a difficult medium to master, Dibble was intrigued by the challenge and unpredictability of it. He experimented with the application of pigment on paper and the choice of colors in the paintings which gave his paintings an abstract feel. He filled his brush with pure pigment and mixed colors in the brush instead of on the palette to get more contrast between the colors on the paper. Dibble also applied complimentary colors side by side to create contrast in his paintings. From the end of the 1940s on, Dibble continued to experiment with watercolor creating works that ranged from conservative to experimental. The publication of his textbook on watercolor instruction in the 1950s published by Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, a national publishing company, is evidence that Dibble’s watercolors had gained national recognition and he was accepted in places other than Utah.

Even though Dibble believed it necessary to maintain a mostly conservative approach to his art in the 1940s, he continued to incorporate modernist ideas and techniques into his paintings. By the early 1950s he began to gradually bring back more overt modern elements into his work. This gradual return to a more modern style coincided with three events during this decade. In 1950 Dibble was promoted to associate professor at the University of Utah which brought him closer to tenure and allowed more freedom of style and less fear of being fired. Three years later, Dibble was hired by The Salt Lake Tribune to be an art critic, which allowed

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him to promote progressive art work and ideas through his writings and reviews.\footnote{108} His weekly column also gave him a larger venue to broadcast his ideas to a wider audience and to better promote the advanced work of other Utah artists. These two events along with Stewart’s retirement from the University in 1956 allowed for Dibble to pursue a greater freedom in the modernism of his work.

Through the efforts and persistence of artists like Dibble, early European modernism was finally beginning to be accepted into the art community of Utah by the beginning of the 1950s. This was evidenced by the hiring of modern artists such as Dibble to teach at the universities throughout the state. Modernism was gaining acceptance, but slowly. For artists with modern inclinations in their work, this meant that they did not have to overcome quite as many obstacles as they did ten years before. They still had to face challenges however. Perhaps this was in part because the public was still not very familiar with modern and semi-abstract work despite all that Dibble and others were doing.

\textbf{Dibble’s Modern Work in the 1950s}

The 1950s in America was a time of prosperity and change, but it was also a time of suspiciousness and fear with the Red Scare and the Cold War. It was the time of McCarthyism when anything that was unfamiliar and foreign was considered suspicious, even Communist. The early forms of modernism such as Cubism, because they were more familiar, were not seen as threatening to America as were newer forms of modern art coming out of New York City. It was also a time of paranoia, a time to rally against the Communist threat. This paranoia led to many forms of patriotism. Americans looked to things that were familiar to them in this time of uncertainty. Amid the suspicion of the Cold War and the Red Scare in America many artists

\footnote{108 Olpin, \textit{Utah Art}, 137.}
continued the tradition of finding inspiration in their respective surroundings. Even modernists were inspired by the beauty of the surrounding landscape and incorporated it into their work creating art that proved that art could still be progressive and American.

Utah artists, modern as well as conservative, found comfort in the familiar natural scenery of the state during this time of fear and suspicion. The naturally abstract landscape of the state is something which many native painters working elsewhere came back to paint. Waldo Midgley, a Utah artist who spent most of his time in New York, claimed that there was no place comparable to his home state.

There is no place that can touch the color and atmosphere of Utah. Even in the winter it is potent and poignant to the artist. I love Utah’s gorgeous mountains, her cool mountain streams and stately poplar trees, the sagebrush, the farm lands, the Great Salt Lake and the unsurpassed sunsets.109

Many local artists felt the same although the inspiration for individual artists came from different parts of the state. LeConte Stewart found his inspiration in the rural towns and farms while George Dibble found his in the varied landscape of southern Utah. Although Dibble discovered inspiration in the natural wonders of the southern part of the state, he still experimented with form and style. Following an earlier tradition of modern artists, such as Maynard Dixon, Dibble was able to capture his natural soundings in an acceptable modern style, because the landscapes of the southwest region of the country are naturally abstract.

In the early 1950s Dibble spent several summers in southern Utah as a visiting art professor at the Branch Agricultural College in Cedar City (later to become Southern Utah University). While there he was inspired by the abstract rock formations and the bold colors of

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109 Robert S. Olpin, Waldo Midgley, 16.
the national parks and monuments. Speaking of the artistic feeling of nature and especially Utah’s landscape, Dibble stated, “Cedar Breaks is a fantastic array of giant color samples laid out to test the sun at the climax of a trail past the Zion overlook.”\textsuperscript{110} The naturally abstract red rock formations of southern Utah are much like modern art; when experienced for the first time both can be overwhelming and confusing because of the unfamiliar shapes and forms found within. With time, understanding, and repeated exposure both abstract art and the rock formations of the area become less overwhelming. It is not surprising that an artist with an interest in Cubism and other forms of modern art, such as Dibble, would be drawn to the beauty in the inherent abstractness of the rock formations of this region.

Dibble was not the first artist to be lured to the formations in areas like Zion National Park and Cedar Breaks National Monument. Henri Moser also painted the landscape of southern Utah in the 1920s and 1930s and captured the natural beauties of the landscape in the area.\textsuperscript{111} At the same time that Moser was in southern Utah, many other visiting artists came to the region to paint the canyons and deserts. Conrad Buff first visited Zion Canyon in 1923 and was fascinated with the design of the landscape, with the hills outlined against the deep blue sky.\textsuperscript{112} In the 1930s Maynard Dixon traveled to Zion Canyon and spent several decades painting in the region.\textsuperscript{113} These earlier modernists incorporated innovative elements in their work such as the flattening of objects and the use of bold colors, but their work was not considered abstract.

During his time teaching and living in Cedar City, Dibble painted at least three paintings depicting Cedar Breaks National Monument, which is located just outside of the town. The

\textsuperscript{111} Donna Poulton, Painter of Utah’s Canyons and Deserts, (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 2009), 172. Moser worked and taught at the Cedar City Branch of the Agricultural College from 1915-1917. It was during this period of time that he was introduced to the splendor of the terrain surrounding Cedar City.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 103.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. Dixon even built a house in Mt. Carmel during the period he spent in the region of southern Utah.
paintings reflect the abstract qualities of the landscape surrounding Cedar City to varying degrees. The first of this group *Cedar Breaks 1* (Fig. 10) was painted in early 1952. It is a rather representational landscape resembling a work of Cezanne with some definite abstract qualities to it but is still conservative in nature. It is the second painting in the group, however, which truly reflects the natural abstraction of the southwest.

*Cedar Breaks 2* (Fig. 11) was also painted in 1952. This painting is quite different from the first painting in the set and is an example of how Dibble experimented more freely with his modernist inclinations in his work during the 1950s. This painting of the monument is more abstract in line, form and composition. The sides of the mountains turned into blocks of vivid, unmixed colors with very little detail created by wide brushstrokes. Although this version is highly abstract, it still has recognizable forms such as the pine trees on the left side of the painting and the tops of the plateaus. The trees are reduced to swift simple brushstrokes as opposed to the more detailed pine trees in the first image of the series. In *Cedar Breaks 2*, Dibble did not paint the whole surface of the paper, but used the white or negative space to his advantage which gives the viewers eyes a rest, unlike the first painting of this subject wherein paint filled up almost all of the paper. Dibble said that the viewer “should read the white negative spaces just as you would the colored positive spaces.” This is true, because as one views the brush strokes and the lines, the white spaces appear to give form to the sides of the cliffs and the sky. Although *Cedar Breaks 2* is the more abstract of the two paintings, it is in some ways less busy than the first image and it allows the eyes of the viewer to rest on the empty white spaces.

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114 George Dibble, Discussion of George Dibble’s Paintings, DVD the Utah Museum of Fine Art, 1983.
Even though modern art slowly began to gain acceptance in Utah in the 1950s, there still continued to be some uneasy feeling towards semi-abstract art. An incident involving Dibble’s *Cedar Breaks 2* illustrates this feeling. As a sign of change, this particular painting won first prize in a statewide art show in Utah in the mid-1950s and was purchased by the Utah State Agricultural College. Earlier USAC was a bastion of modernism in the state, but with the retirement of Fletcher things changed. Sometime after the purchase of the painting Dibble traveled to Logan so that he could photograph the work for the cover of his textbook on the instruction of watercolor. Once at the college Dibble was told that the school had no record of the painting and that it was not in their inventory. Puzzled, Dibble made his way out of the building and passed the janitor’s office when he noticed the door of the office was open and the painting thumb tacked to the wall with no frame or mat. After inquiring of the janitor where he had found the painting, Dibble was told that he had taken it out of the garbage.116 Dismayed, Dibble proceeded to take the painting home with him and eventually featured it on the front of his textbook. In 1991 Bob Olpin chose to use this particular painting on the back cover of the first edition of his survey of Utah art, thus proving that it was an important painting in the development of Utah art.117

The rejection of modern art and the mishandling of certain works including *Pay Dirt* and *Cedar Breaks 2* reflected the attitude of much of the public and many of the critics of the time. Perhaps a major reason was because the public in general continued to prefer paintings which were representational, which were more familiar to them. Later in his life Dibble remembered that “…modern art in Utah always had a bit of a struggle to gain a hold, no matter the time

116 In spite of a period of encouragement of Modern art in Logan under Calvin Fletcher, modern artists faced more criticism once he retired in 1947. The incident involving *Cedar Breaks 2* most likely would not have occurred if Fletcher was head of the department in the 1950s.
117 George Dibble, Personal stories, personal archive.
In regards to the importance of preserving these early modern works, Dibble put it best when he said from personal experience, “Too often the art works of the state are mishandled or simply neglected to the state of decay. It is a heritage which can never be replaced.” It is true that modern art was not a favored style during the 1940s and 1950s in Utah as is evident in the mishandling of some of the art. However, the ill-treatment of some works is nonetheless a part of the legacy of the struggle to bring awareness to the region of progressive ideas in art.

Following this event Dibble used the criticism of his work in a positive manner to create two of what could be considered some of his best works during the mid 1950s. By the mid-twentieth century Dibble had developed his mature style, which allowed him more freedom to experiment in his work. The development of his signature style, along with the fact that more people began to appreciate modern art at midcentury, allowed Dibble’s work to be more pleasing to a wider audience. The 1950s was also the time when people began to buy and collect his work proving that modern art was gaining some acceptance in Utah. Dibble found a way to combine all of his modern ideas and techniques into a composition as demonstrated in his two paintings *Temple of Sinawawa* and *Batch Mix Plant at the Mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon*.

In the first example, *Temple of Sinawawa* (Fig. 12), another of his southern Utah paintings completed in 1953, it is evident that Dibble was more concerned with how the rocks were painted rather than accurately depicting a distinct landscape of Zion National Park. The tall, straight lines of the rocks that make up the center grouping of the composition give the impression of smokestacks or building blocks rather than sandstone cliffs. This work recalls the highly abstract *Cedar Breaks 2* with the quick brushstrokes, the overlapping of straight lines, and

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120 Patricia Hills, *Stuart Davis*, 73.
the angularity of form. Dibble used the abstract qualities of the watercolor medium to his advantage in creating this work. There is greater confidence in this work and his experimentation is freer and more relaxed than previous work. The harsh straight edges make it difficult for the viewer to recognize the landscape at first look, but upon closer examination the rock formations become more recognizable. This painting is an expression or an essence of the landscape. Dibble used a similar application of pigment in both Cedar Breaks 2 and Temple of Sinawawa. He loaded his brush with pure color then applied it to the paper in quick but controlled movement. Temple of Sinawawa shows a greater freedom of form, brush stroke, and color than some of his earlier watercolors.

During this rich period of the 1950s, Dibble also began to paint industrial scenes. Industrial scenes and the raw nature of southern Utah both contain many of the elements of Cubism and early modernism that fascinated Dibble. An example of one of these industrial sites is his Batch Mix Plant at the Mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon (Fig. 13). Although Dibble captured various industrial scenes in his art, art historian Robert Olpin stated that at first Dibble was not fond of the industrial age with the cluttering of the land, but it was what he chose to paint. 121 Despite Dibble’s dislike of the industrialization of the country he knew it was a part of life, a push from the past into the future. Twenty to thirty years before Dibble, Precisionists such as Charles Sheeler and Charles Demuth chose to paint factories and other industrial sites celebrating technology, industrialism and its clean lines and forms. 122 Even though Dibble was not a Precisionist and did not celebrate industrialism as they did, he was one of the few in Utah to paint industrial scenes because they offered beauty with their abstract and geometric design.

121 Olpin’s full quotation is as follows “Dibble was not fond of the industrial age with the cluttering of the land and the complication of movement, but he said ‘We’re there, we’re in it’ and that is what he chose to paint.” Olpin, Utah Art, Utah Artists: 150 Year Survey, 83.
The industrialism of the land signaled change in the American way of life and since change is one of the main aspects of modernism, it was natural for Dibble to represent modern life in his work.

There were several industrial sites in and around Salt Lake City where Dibble lived, and he painted many of them including the cement plant in Big Cottonwood Canyon. Most people go to the canyon to see natural beauty, but Dibble saw more than that when he visited the canyon. In his painting he merged the natural splendor of the canyon with the magnificence of industrial elements by joining together the cement plant and the mountains in the background to create a harmonious scene. The orange, brown and red hues of the canyon reflect the color of the rusty red metal of the plant. The angularity of the brush strokes which make up the mountain side echo the angles and the lines of the conveyor belts at the plant. The cement plant in this painting is similar to the central rock formation in Dibble’s Temple of Sinawawa with the dark intersecting straight lines and quick brushstrokes, showing that he even included some industrial elements in his landscapes of southern Utah. The colors in Temple of Sinawawa bring to mind the rusted metal of an industrial site, especially with the red brown line running through the middle of the rock cluster. The semi-abstract forms of the mountain and the cement plant and the personal expression of Dibble’s style are consistent with the ideas about modern art that he held during the previous decade during the struggle for the acceptance of modern art in Utah.

These works from the 1950s were painted at a key moment in the history of Utah art. This period marked the beginning of the transition from semi-abstract works by artists such as Dibble to a generation of greater experimentation even though Utah still continued to lag behind other parts of the country when it came to accepting modern art. Beginning in the mid 1940s and continuing through the 1950s New York witnessed a transition from early forms of modern art to
a new style with Abstract Expressionism, while Utah was still trying to accept older forms of modern art such as Cubism. For example, in Utah in the 1940s Dibble’s *Long Island Sound* was the fresh and new form of modernism, while modernism in New York in the late 1940s was Abstract Expressionist paintings like Jackson Pollock’s *Full Fathom Five* (Fig. 14).

Dibble’s art as well as his writing in the *Salt Lake Tribune* encouraged and promoted the work of the next generation of local Abstract Expressionists like Doug Snow and Don Olsen. Dibble’s own experiences made it easier for this new generation of artists to take art further until it arrived at a point where their works were almost purely nonrepresentational and completely abstract with Abstract Expressionism. Regarding the importance of the earlier generation of abstract artists to the following generation of abstract artists in Utah, Ed Maryon, a watercolorist and former Dean of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Utah said that George Dibble opened the door so that the next generation could take art further. As abstract art generated more attention in Utah, Dibble continued to act as an advocate for these younger artists even though his style began to appear more dated. Dibble continued to nurture modernism until he retired from both the University of Utah and *The Salt Lake Tribune* in the late 1980s.

In spite of Dibble’s efforts to promote the members of the younger generation, abstract art was still not fully accepted in the 1950s. In 1953 Olsen entered his painting *Abstraction #4* into the Utah State Fair. It won first prize and was purchased by the state collection. The purchase of this abstract painting had a similar effect on the public as did some of George Dibble’s early modernist paintings, including Dibble’s *Pay Dirt*. Olsen’s painting caused widespread controversy including many angry letters to the editor because of its complete abstraction.
of forms. Like Dibble, despite the criticism and the outrage Olsen eventually gained respect as one of the important Utah artists.

The new and innovative principles behind Abstract Expressionism and other forms of art in the 1950s were confusing to people who were not familiar with this new step in art. This is evident in an incident which occurred in Salt Lake City in this same period when a national exhibit featuring a few Abstract Expressionist artists came to the University of Utah. The workers who were unpacking the art works to be displayed in the show accidentally discarded a work by Robert Motherwell, thinking that it was part of one of the discarded packing crates. Eventually the mistake was realized and the painting was reinstated into the exhibit.

The experiences of Dibble in the struggle for the acceptance of modern art in Utah became a symbol of this challenge that modern artists faced. His experience with the mishandling of his Pay Dirt is an example of this struggle and the painting was included in an exhibit which was put together by Will South a few years ago on censorship at the Salt Lake Art Center. Another part of his modernist legacy is the paintings which are in books on Utah art, including Cedar Breaks 2 and Temple of Sinawawa.

Conclusion

In the first half of the twentieth century, modern art and modern ideas began to spread throughout the United States. Artists who had studied in European cities returned home to New York and other large American cities with knowledge of European modernism hoping to share this new form of art with the rest of the country. Modern art went from purely a European style to a combination of European and American ideas during the first few decades of the twentieth century.

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127 Dibble’s Temple of Sinawawa was featured in a book entitled A Century of Sanctuary: The Art of Zion National Park that celebrates the many depictions of Zion National Park by both Utah artists and visiting artists over a century. This particular painting is the only highly abstract painting featured in the book showing the legacy that Dibble left Utah.
century, adapting to the ideas and subject matter of artists in various regions of the country. However, not every region of the country welcomed these new ideas and forms of art as quickly as New York City, and it took much longer for certain areas to accept modern art.

The conservative nature of thoughts and ideas that the public held in Utah during the middle part of the twentieth century made it difficult for modern ideas to come to fruition in this region of the country. In the area of the visual arts especially, modernism was criticized, looked down upon and in some cases even rejected because of unfamiliarity with it. There were a handful of native artists from Utah who had studied in places like New York City and had the desire to teach and introduce the new ideas and techniques of modernism to people in their own hometowns in Utah, and who were passionate about the importance of modern art. George Dibble was one of them. Modern art was introduced into the public sphere by him and other artists in Utah but with much opposition. This was a struggle for artists who saw the need for progressive art and were passionate about spreading it through Utah.

The experiences of modern Utah artists, in particular George Dibble, have added insight to the discussion of the struggle for acceptance of modern art in Utah during the late 1930s through the 1950s. The experiences discussed illustrate the impact that this struggle had on artists, as well as on the attitude of the public and the critics. On the one hand this discussion shows the struggle of the artists against the public’s artistic taste and critics, and on the other hand it demonstrates that artists like Dibble were not alone as they worked for acceptance. The evidence provided proves that there were institutions and individuals, such as Calvin Fletcher the head of the art department at the Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, Utah, that welcomed fresh new ideas in art and helped Utah modern artists by exhibiting their art and hiring them to teach at the local Universities and Colleges. Although artists such as Dibble did face opposition
during their careers, as they persevered, they passed on their knowledge of and enthusiasm for modern art to other aspiring artists. Like other modern artists during the mid twentieth century, George Dibble left a great legacy for the history of art in Utah as he continued to support progressive art throughout his career which helped make the path a little smoother for the generation of modern artists who followed. Through discussion of the experiences and legacies of the participants in this often over looked period of art in the region, the public has been reminded of the contributions early modernists made to the culture and history of Utah.
Figure 1. Henri Matisse, *Harmony in Red*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 5’ 11” x 8’ 1”. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
Figure 2. Pablo Picasso, *Farmers Wife*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 31 7/8” x 25 5/8”. State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.
Figure 3. James Taylor Harwood, *Preparations for Dinner*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 38” x 49 ½ “. Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Figure 4. John Henri Moser, *Fauvist Autumn*, nd. Oil on masonite 17” x22”. Moser Family Collection.
Figure 5. George S. Dibble, *Pay Dirt*, 1938. Oil on canvas, 18” x 30”. Utah State Art Collection.

Figure 6. George S. Dibble, *Long Island Sound*, 1939. Oil on paper, 20” x 24 ½ “. Private Collection.
Figure 7. William J. Parkinson, *Within the Ancient Underground Temple of Oude*, 1945. Oil on board, 24” x 30”. Springville Museum of Art, Springville, Utah.
Figure 8. George Dibble, *Mount Olympus*, 1940s. Oil on Canvas, 28” x 34”. Private Collection.
Figure 9. LeConte Stewart, *Spring Time in Peterson*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 28” x 34”. LDS Church History Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah.
Figure 10. George S. Dibble, *Cedar Breaks 1*, 1952. Watercolor on paper, 15” x 22”. Brigham Young Museum of Art, Provo, Utah.

Figure 11. George S. Dibble, *Cedar Breaks 2*, 1952. Watercolor on paper, 15” x 22”. Private Collection.
Figure 12. George S. Dibble, *Temple of Sinawawa*, 1953. Watercolor on paper, 22 ½” x 30”. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, Utah.

Figure 13. George S. Dibble, *Batch Mix Plant at the Mouth of Big Cottonwood Canyon*, 1955. Watercolor on paper, 22 1/8” x 30”. Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, Utah.
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