

George Tooker

Artist Biography

George Tooker (1920–2011) is best known for his use of the traditional, painstaking medium of egg tempera in compositions reflecting urban life in American postwar society. Born in Brooklyn, he received a degree in English from Harvard University before he began his studies at the Art Students League in 1943, where he worked under the regionalist painter Reginald Marsh. In 1944, Tooker met the artist Paul Cadmus, and they soon became lovers. Cadmus, sixteen years his senior, introduced Tooker to the artist Jared French, with whom he was romantically involved, and French's wife, Margaret Hoening French, and the four of them traveled extensively throughout Europe and vacationed regularly together. Tooker appears in a number of the photographs taken by PaJaMa, the photographic collective formed by Cadmus and the Frenches, and he served as a model for Cadmus's painting *Inventor* (1946). Cadmus and French introduced Tooker to the time-intensive medium of egg tempera, which would become his principal medium.

Tooker's career found early success, due in part to his friend Lincoln Kirstein, the co-founder of the New York City Ballet, encouraging the inclusion of his work in the *Fourteen Americans* (1946) and *Realists and Magic-Realists* (1950) exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1950, *Subway* (1950) entered the Whitney Museum of American Art's collection—the artist's first museum acquisition—and the following year he received his first solo exhibition at the Edwin Hewitt Gallery.

Near the end of the 1940s, Tooker parted ways with Cadmus because of the latter's ongoing relationship with the Frenches. In 1957, he moved to Vermont with his partner, Bill Christopher, where they built a house near the Frenches' summer home. Tooker and Christopher remained together until the latter's death, in 1973. Over the course of his more than sixty-year career, Tooker was elected to the National Academy of Design in 1968, was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and received the National Medal of Arts in 2007.