

## Paul Cadmus

### Artist Biography

Singularly influential to subsequent generations of artists, Paul Cadmus (1904–1999) is best known for his lively satirical compositions of American life and social mores, and for his finely rendered drawings of muscular male nudes. Born to artist parents in New York City, Cadmus began his artistic training at the age of fifteen, enrolling in the National Academy of Design. The school's traditional approach of students' first mastering plaster casts before working from live models provided Cadmus with a solid understanding of the human form. Completing his studies in 1926, he supported himself by working for an advertising agency as he continued to develop his artistic skills at the Art Students League. There, he met fellow aspiring artist Jared French and the two soon became lovers. Leaving their day jobs in pursuit of artistic and sexual freedom, Cadmus and French embarked on a two-year trip to Europe in 1931, where they saw works by Italian masters such as Luca Signorelli and Andrea Mantegna and by French academic painters such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Eugène Delacroix. This exposure informed the development of Cadmus's signature style of bulging musculature and torqued bodies evident in his major early works produced in Mallorca, Spain.

Returning to New York and settling into a Greenwich Village apartment with French, Cadmus found work as an artist with the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). When the Navy removed his boisterous painting *The Fleet's In!* (1934) from a PWAP exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, DC, for its purported portrayal of "a disgraceful, drunken, sordid, disreputable brawl," the controversy thrust Cadmus into the national spotlight. Despite this unexpected fame, Cadmus continued to produce critically bold paintings, including a sardonic series entitled *Aspects of Suburban Life*, with characteristically lively, complex compositions parodying subjects such as "commuter rush" and "golf."

The year 1937 marked a turning point professionally and personally for Cadmus. Midtown Galleries, in New York, hosted Cadmus's first solo exhibition, which was attended by more than 7,000 viewers curious to see the controversial works covered in the press. At the same time, after a decade-long courtship, French married the artist Margaret Hoening. The trio became nearly inseparable and together formed a photography collective they called PaJaMa, a portmanteau of their first names (Paul, Jared, and Margaret). Using Margaret's Leica, they captured themselves and their friends in carefully composed tableaux on the beaches of Fire Island, Nantucket, and Provincetown. Appearing regularly in these images are fellow artists and members of the gay community, including Cadmus's sister Fidelma Cadmus Kirstein and George Platt Lynes, among others. Also in 1937, Cadmus met Lincoln Kirstein, the cofounder of the New York City Ballet and Cadmus's future brother-in-law, who introduced him to the ballet world, which consequently provided him with new models for his artworks. The following year, he designed the sets and costumes for Kirstein's production of *Filling Station—A Ballet-Document in One Act*, which premiered at the Wadsworth Atheneum of Art. Kirstein can also be credited with Cadmus's inclusion in the pivotal American Realists and Magic Realists exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art, in 1943.

In the early forties, Cadmus and French adopted the classical technique of egg tempera, a painstaking process that limited him to producing about two paintings a year. A master draftsman, Cadmus increasingly turned toward drawing—mainly male nudes—around the same time. Indeed, his second solo exhibition at Midtown Galleries in 1945 consisted of forty drawings and only one painting. In that same decade, Cadmus met the young artist George Tooker, a student of the regionalist painter Reginald Marsh at the Art Students League, and they became partners in the early fifties and remained close with the Frenches. Under the influence of Cadmus and French, Tooker adopted egg tempera as his preferred medium. In 1964, Cadmus met the actor Jon Anderson and embarked on a thirty-four year collaboration and partnership, with Anderson serving as Cadmus's main model for drawings that the artist described as "true, representational, delicate, sensual."