What is "291"?
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A NOther year of experimenting done. Nine years of public experimenting. Experimenting in the little garret—variously termed Photo-Secession, Little Gallery, "291"—at 291 Fifth Avenue, New York. Several thousand visitors. Not, by far, as many as in former years. Curiosity seekers have fallen away.

A May night. Nearly June. I sat in my room thinking, weighing, what had been done during the year. Had anything been done? Anything added? Comparing the year to past years, subconsciously visualizing the year in connection with the coming year. What work was to be done during the coming year? As I was thinking of these things—without crystallizing any thought—it flashed through my mind that, during the past year, a certain question had been put to me, more and more frequently. The question: "What does '291' mean?" I remembered the half-conscious, invariable answer. I remembered shrugging my shoulders amusedly, smiling as I replied: "291, what does it mean?" Letters too had come from Europe, quite a few, asking me that same question, "What is it, this '291' that people are talking about?" Most of these inquiries remained unanswered, filed away. Some were answered in the same spirit as the questioners in the little garret had been answered. There was no particular reason why some inquiries were filed away, why some were answered. And as all this passed through my mind it suddenly struck me to ask myself, "What is '291'?" Do I know? No one thus far had told the world. No one thus far had suggested its real meaning in CAMERA WORK, and so again it flashed upon me to ask myself, "What is '291'?" I would like to know. How find out? Why not let the people tell me what it is to them. And in telling me, perhaps they will tell each other. Some say 'tis I. I know it is not I. What is it?
And then and there I decided that a Number of Camera Work should be devoted to this question. I decided that the Number should contain no pictures; I decided that forthwith I would ask twenty or thirty people, men and women, of different ages, of different temperaments, of different walks of life, from different parts of the country, and some in Europe, to put down in as few words as possible, from ten to no more than fifteen hundred, what "291" means to them; what they see in it; what it makes them feel. Not what it is. And I would ask them to eliminate, if possible, any reference to myself. I felt that in this way I might possibly find out what "291" is, or come near to finding it out. For if all would write what they felt in their hearts, a common note in all probability would run through all the worded heart-beats. And thus too the world might learn to know.

The next morning as people began coming into the little garret, I began my selection. To those who did not come, and could not come, and whom I felt should be represented, I wrote. In due course the MSS. came in. Instead of twenty or thirty there were over sixty-five. Some who heard of the idea volunteered because they were delighted with the opportunity of saying something. And now, herewith, I publish what has been received. There has been no editing, and what has been received is published.

Alfred Stieglitz
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THE MIRROR

"Man is the measure of all things."—Protagoras.

I am the mirror wherein man sees man,
Whenever he looks deep into my eyes
And looks for me alone, he there descries
The human plan.

I am the mirror of man's venturing mind,
And in my face alone he yet may read
The only reason for the every need
Of humankind.

I am the mirror of man's eager heart,
Within me lies the secret of his quest:
I hear the hidden part that is the rest
Of every part.

I am the mirror of man's weary flesh,
From my deep eyes looks back the valiant soul
Endlessly thriving on the endless dole
Of man's distress.

I am a mirror to the young and old.
The young see in me all their dear desire,
The old find in my ardor their lost fire
Now growing cold.

All things in turn glide o'er my mirror face.
Man looks—and sees the poor forgotten dead—
Looks: And remembers, with a sudden dread,
The old lost grace.

Eyes that are pure find purity in me,
Lips that are gross seek grossness like to theirs,
Freely gives back the mirror all it bears—
Free to the free.
Old sins, old hopes, old struggles and old days
Come back to mock you for a little space.
The old hopes mock the new, upon my face,
And all new ways.

I am the many yet I am the few;
Like and unlike are side by side in me,
Changeless and varying, only I may seem
Both false and true.

I am the fruit of all that man has sowed,
I am the ground he ploughs upon his way
Thro’ time and space. Eternally today
I am the road.

I am the force that quickens all but death,
I am the death that generates the force,
I am the plowman, breathless on his course,
I am his breath.

I am the mirror of the insatiate,
I am the good, the bad, the infinite all,
In me lie the answers to each human call
For I am Fate.

I am the many and the one, the odd
As well as even. Ever in my form
God is renewed each time a man is born—
For I am God.

I am the alternating peace and strife—
I am the mirror of all man ever is—
I am the sum of all that has been his—
For I am life.

Mabel Dodge
WHAT 291 IS TO ME

"291" to me is a "Salon," a laboratory, and a refuge—a place where people may exchange ideas and feelings, where artists can present and try out their experiments and where those who are tired of what is called "practical" life may find a change of spiritual atmosphere.

I go there when my irritation is intense—as to a cooling oasis. I go there to meet a rare human group in which is nourished a strenuous love for human expression. I go there to see Alfred Stieglitz, to live for an hour in his spirit, to realize his pure courage and to feel his genuine attempt to get at what is called the truth, which is something that may be felt but never defined. Because he loves the truth he is hospitable to all who feel they have some vision, no matter how slight, and even to those who desire the vision but know they have it not.

Any serious sincere person is always welcome at "291"; and for no ulterior motive—just because this is a centre where the "truth" is sought. To me a strenuous morality is the highest way in which the human spirit expresses itself and at "291" the dominant note seems to me a strenuous morality. This place given up in largest measure to the exhibitions and the discussion of the various arts is yet the home of a profound morality. Stern sincerity is the largest element of a morality that does not concern itself with the pious, the hypocritical or the conventional. A sincere man like a sincere art is not merely beautiful—or the art is beautiful because it is stimulating to human relations, to an enhancing vital morality, which is the art of arts, the most complex of all forms, the only art that permanently is of greatest value to the mature spirit.

HUTCHINS HAPGOOD
The reality of anything is its spirit. The spirit of "291" came to me some time before it had any material body. It was in "Camera Notes" for October, 1901, that I found it. Strange as the statement may sound to city dwellers, it is true that was the first number of "Camera Notes" I ever saw, and at that time the term "Pictorial Photography" meant nothing to me. But in that magazine the pictures "September" and "An Icy Night," by Stieglitz, and Mrs. Käsebier's "Fruits of the Earth" were a revelation to me as to what might be accomplished in photography, and great was my joy in them. I subscribed at once for "Camera Notes," and still have the four numbers that came to me, ending with volume six, number one. Then in January 1903 came the first number of Camera Work, and "The Manger," by Mrs. Käsebier, was the first of a long line of pictures from that well-loved publication to be placed above my desk for many days. So the "spirit" led me on, an interested and willing follower, to its final embodiment in "291."

Very wonderful and very real is the human soul. Living, it always is active, and is compelled to express itself. This expression we call Art, in its broad sense. It may be motion, or color, or form, or words, or sounds,—it may even be machinery or engineering: so far as it is an expression of soul power, it is art. So, when men, speaking only of one form of soul-expression, cry "Art is dead!" remember that Art cannot die so long as the human soul lives. Browning and Tennyson have lived and have written since some men wailed "Poetry is dead!" and now we have Alfred Noyes and others even in this so-called materialistic age. But Art does not die—cannot die—in any form of expression. True, the expression changes; at times it departs from the "rules of Art" and pursues paths strange and devious before it rests again, for a little space, in some newly accepted form: but this change is not an evidence of death, but of life. And just because the soul is a living thing and must express itself in many ways, it grows weary of one style of expression, no matter how beautiful that may be, and begins in some simple,—possibly some savage way,—to evolve other styles, other forms.

Gothic was at one time the supreme form of expression in architecture. How men loved it! They called upon all nature to furnish forms and ideals for them. Trees and flowers, beasts and birds, fishes, waves of the sea and flames of fire,—all living, moving things must be wrought in stone that it too, might become a living thing,—a vital expression of the human soul. And Gothic developed, and ever its forms grew complex and more elaborate, more labored, until the waving, leaping, twisting, shimmering lines of the "flamboyant" were the sign that the end had been reached. Then came the reaction. The world saw buildings arising like the cathedral of Orleans, and in place of lofty portals crowded with statues of saints and angels and wreathed with flowers, there were but simple openings apparently cut out of a plain wall. Instead of spires springing from the earth like fountains of flowers, there were drums surrounded by columns and placed one upon another. Instead of flame-like window tracery ribbed and flower-leaved, men saw the
"plate"—a flat wall with pointed openings simply "cut out" to admit light. Instead of birds and flowers and leaves cunningly carved, there were spears and shields and helmets and gloves and boots and the skulls of animals. The soul had changed its form of expression.

In literature there was a time when thought must be beautifully rendered. Form was everything. Even the thought was not greatly valued if the form were faulty. An unbalanced sentence in prose,—an "imperfect" line in poetry,—were sins against "correct taste" that could not be forgiven. But the restless human soul could not always find pleasure in the balanced pomp of Johnson, the "correctness" of Addison, nor even in the musical sentences of De Quincey and Ruskin; and the school of poetry of which the "cloying sweetness" of Swinburne was the climax, became utterly distasteful. Carlyle, in a savage fury, abandoned his early, smooth style, and hacked out sentences for his grim and turgid thought as were he wielding the axe of Odin; while Browning's broken and unpolished lines have been no small factor in the forming of that cult which seems to regard the reading of his poems as a religion, and the understanding of them a mystery.

So, too, in painting, the form of soul-expression continually changes, as does the attitude. The look is now backward to the ancients, now forward to the unknown. One age regards color of supreme importance, to another age the one consideration is form. At one time everything must be painted with painstaking smoothness and delicacy of coloring, and then a reaction demands boldness and positive coarseness of execution. It was only a hundred years ago, more or less, that "color" was thought to be a hindrance to painting! The feeling was strongest in Germany, where Cornelius wrote "The brush has become the ruin of our art." Certain events drew attention to Greece, and at once "classic form" became all important. Men argued that Greek statues were colorless yet were supremely beautiful, hence the essence of beauty was form. Color distracted the sense and hindered the true appreciation of beauty. And so, though color had attained to a refinement that was marvelous, it was cast aside and abstract beauty of line was cultivated with an astonishing intensity. There was a revolution in the world of painting, and the slogan of it was "Outline, outline!" And truly there were wonderful things done. Not willingly would we lose the cartoons of Carstens, Genelli, and others; yet color soon came to its own again, even where the new school had its beginning.

We ourselves are living in a time of revolutionary upheaval. The great soul of humanity is strung to an amazing activity. This is evidenced everywhere: in the agitating of matters long since thought to be settled, in the questioning of beliefs long held sacred, in a rebellion against "canons" and "laws" long considered binding. Today nothing is unchallenged; and when one talks of "regular" or "normal" conditions, the question comes at once, "What is 'normal,'—what is 'regular'?'" The art world could not escape this "storm of newness," as one has called it. Nay, the art-world must feel it most of all, because art is soul-expression. Strange things have been done in music, in dancing, in painting, in all of "The seven arts,"—possibly the strangest in painting and in photography.
And now I have gotten back to "291" again. Only at rare intervals do I visit the "little galleries," for miles of distance and the stern demands of a busy life keep me from it. Yet it was in "291" that I saw the best exhibition of water-colors that my eyes ever beheld. It was there that I saw Steichen's great photographs of Rodin's "Balzac" and also a bronze cast of the face of that amazing statue. It was there that I saw landscapes and mountains in colors that were strange to me, and drawings of the human figure that I could not comprehend, and also "portraits" of men expressed in cryptic designs and algebraic formulae. And all of it was interesting to me—very interesting. Why? Because it was a record of psychical experiment,—it evidenced attempts of the human soul to discover for itself a new means of expression.

Here are men weary of the conventional. They rebel against the task of doing the same thing over and over again in the same old way. Of course, the old way is never quite the same, for each personality will give it his own interpretation,—that it cannot help. But these men want to find an expression that shall be not only personal, but original,—unlike all else that is. And so, one has gone back to pre-historic America for his studies, and his work seems to indicate the influence of ancient Toltec ideals. Another draws narrow lines of red and yellow adown the trunks of his trees. Another paints vast shadowy forms that suggest the pipes of a gigantic church-organ, while still another draws faces and figures that look like the untutored attempts of little children. Another uses lines, straight and curved, crossing the canvas in all directions; others still, work in bronze and in marble and achieve heads and busts that, though labeled "portraits," are really unlike any human being that one has ever seen. All this have I seen in my few visits to "291," and more—much more. For there were exhibitions of photography, as well. In them, also, were strife and "newness." But always the exhibition was a joy. The selection of subjects, the subtle management of light and shadow, the soft diffusion, the coolness of this and the warmth of that scene, the Greek pose of a nude, the compelling beauty of a head, the sense of pulsing life given by a spring picture, the touching innocence and trust suggested in the portrayal of a child,—all these have I seen upon the walls of "291."

What does it all mean? Well, to me it means that in the great city there is a little "agora" where men may listen, and may speak freely; there is a "bema" where one may proclaim whatever message he feels impelled to deliver. No one shall stop him, nor hinder him there; he shall speak boldly, and as truly as his own condition will permit. For most of these men, possibly, have not yet found what they seek. This that is shown is but an evidence of the quest. But, what an encouragement it must be to them to know that there is a place where they can deliver their message and find encouragement to work on towards the goal. The goal may never be attained—it may be unattainable. All the more honor, then, to them who strive to attain.

And "291" is the centre of the art-life of today. Not merely is it a place where beautiful photographs and paintings are exhibited, not merely a place where things strange and unusual may be seen, not merely a pulpit
whence “new” doctrines may be proclaimed, but a real, pulsing, quickening centre, radiating influences that are felt not only in the big city, but throughout the land,—influences that incite to do the best, to live up to the light given, to follow loftier ideals, and to strive mightily for accomplishment.

And the “291” spirit came at first from one man. He conceived the idea, and made the “little galleries” a reality, because he wanted to help others. The influence of the place is his, the encouragement and the help received by those who visit there are an influence emanating from his own generous personality. He helps by his own beautiful work, by gentle criticism and sympathetic smile, and by kindly silence. What shall we say of him but that he has done far more than he ever can realize to ease the burdens of daily care, to bring joy to many a heart, and unconsciously to win for himself the blessings that surely fall to those who nobly forget themselves in their endeavor to serve others.

CHARLES E. S. RASAY

A LETTER FROM PRISON

[Mr. Wolff was imprisoned thirty days for a political “crime.” This letter was written without any idea of publication. Upon the request of the Editor, Mr. Wolff granted permission to incorporate the letter in this book.]

MY DEAR STEIGLITZ:

Sleepless on my prison cot in the stillness of night I was thinking of you, of “our little gallery; of the spirit of ‘291’.” This place reminds me awfully of the other place—it is so different!!! Here on the Isle of Sighs and Curses but no songs, alas! everything is depression, suppression, and repression; at “291” everything is expression, impression, and more expression. Here in prison everything is institutional, uniform, routinal, dogmatic, academic, counted, fastened, barred and hopeless; there at “291” everything is free, informal, enthusiasm, struggle, attainment, realization, expansion, elation, joy, life. I have always felt it, but I feel it now more than ever that next to my own little studio, “291” is for me the freest and purest breathing place for what is commonly called the soul. There one is free to delight in the freedom of expression in others, thus making it one’s own freedom and one’s own expression.

I do earnestly hope that all the rotten, filthy, corrupting prisons will be wiped away and the system that necessitates prisons will vanish from the face of the earth while the spirit of “291” will grow and multiply, for it is the spirit of freedom, of self-expression, of art, of life in the highest and deepest.

ADOLF WOLFF

October 1, 1914.
Workhouse—
Blackwells Island, N. Y.
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

Visitors to "291" will find no difficulty in calling to mind how readily Mr. Stieglitz replies with his usual "I cannot tell you that" in response to some inquisitor who pleadingly entreats him for an explanation of what the paintings mean to him. I fail to see how Mr. Stieglitz could justly claim an adequate reply to this subject, when it is quite apparent that it is through the many exhibitions of these paintings, coupled with an inexplicable something else, which have given the Secession its unparalleled record, and have also rendered its meaning so significant. Without losing sight of his wonderful Socratic ability, I think that Mr. Stieglitz will be obliged to plead his inconsistency this once.

It would be sheer impertinence to encourage the idea that words are efficient to convey all that I gleaned from "291." I well remember how baffled and perplexed I became when I first saw the exhibitions there. I could see nothing inviting or attractive in paintings so devoid of "beauty," yet judging from the conversations and controversies which were hourly occurrences, I grew convinced that "291" had a potent meaning and a mission which I did not comprehend. It was at this time that I fortunately came across Mr. Keiley’s article entitled, "What is Beauty?" and after a third perusal, I took an agnostic attitude of mind toward the idea of "the beautiful." I gradually yielded up most of my previous opinions, and now my confusions and perplexities have become pleasant reminiscences.

I have found in "291" a spirit which fosters liberty, defines no methods, never pretends to know, never condemns, but always encourages those who are daring enough to be intrepid; those who feel a just repugnance towards the ideals and standards established by conventionalism.

The fallacies of underestimating and censuring with severity that which does not readily appeal to us; of insisting on a unity which offsets progress and leads to stagnation are evils which threaten institutions. I see in "291" their inevitable decline and extermination.

What does "291" mean to me? It has taught me that our work is worthy in proportion as it is the honest expression of ourselves.
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

To tell what “291” means to me, seems more complicated than attempting to describe the famous “Nude Descending a Stairway.”

It was my first morning in New York.
I was obsessed with the fear that I would get lost. Fifth Avenue seemed less stationary than a moving sidewalk.
Then I saw the Flat Iron Building, in the morning light, breasting the winds of heaven like the Victory of Samothrace.
Perhaps, because it was like a snowy mountain peak; perhaps it was its own soaring beauty, but the fear left me and I laughed as though I had found a trail.
And truly I had, for only a few feet away across the sidewalk, were the numerals that have grown to mean more than numerals.
It was an insignificant doorway and it lead into a more insignificant hall, but on the wall was a poster illuminated at the top with the sign of the Golden Disc (Sun) (which?).
Again the finding of the trail!
Came a rattle and whirling in the darkest corner, and lo, the elevator about as large as a nickel-plated toast-rack on end, with a six-foot African in command.
“Does this go up to the Little Galleries?” I breasted.
“Yassum!”
A flash of teeth, a tattoo of huge knuckles, a pull on the rope and we were crawling up inch by inch to Mecca.
When I stepped out on the fourth floor, it was into a pile of boxes and papers and excelsior, evidence of fully finished picture unpacking!
But there wasn’t a sound.
I knew the dark brother in the elevator was watching through the grill, and I felt like Brer Rabbit when he was “dat nerbous, dat he kicked out every tahm a weed tickled him.”
The door of the elevator had closed; it was shaking into the third depth.
Ahead was a tiny hall. There was a strange painting on its small, gray wall. It was in yellows and reds and blues. Something in me called it the “Valley of Crocheted Bed Slippers”—something in me that grinned at first—and later through the many months held to the name in all seriousness.
To the left was a second tiny hall, which opened into two other rooms, one a second cousin to a hall bedroom; the other, the Little Gallery.
From pictures of it, I knew it: its drop lights, its gray walls and simple hangings, and the great copper bowl filled with branches of russet oak leaves. But the things on the walls!
I had come across the continent to see photographs!
I didn’t know that these were Matisse drawings, or that those wild riots of color were Marins and Hartleys. It was just a head-on collision to my plain little brain.
I was now wilder than Brer Rabbit and would have fled, had I not been held by what I now realize was the power of pure beauty of color and rhythm.
Still no sound—no one—just the sunny gloom of the little place.
And those pictures! I couldn’t believe my eyes—what did they mean?
It was as though I had come from or gone to another planet.
In the midst of this whirlwind of thoughts there came the sound of a
voice, staccato, masculine.
I peered out. No one was in the hall. Beyond was another little room,
amber lighted. In it was a carven chest and a great carven bookcase, a deli­
cate black and gold table on which stood a large gum-print of Duse—and
there were tapestries and venetian glass vases. Though so silent, the whole
place was full of an atmosphere.
Again the staccato voice the other side of the tapestry that hung across
a doorway.
It sounded impatient, yet the overtone was right.
Past the tapestry was a long mirror with sconces at either end; in it a
face—my own. It was most uncanny. The eyes looked like the saucer-like
mother-of-pearl discs and black seed iris of an old samoa idol of childhood
memory.
Then this room took shape with its tapestries and wall papers—a great
table, a huge horsehair lounge, a girl’s head against the light of a window,
the click of a typewriter, and standing at a table, a slight figure in black
who was forcing a recreant print or page into place with paste and the palm
of his hand.
“Good morning,” I said, “I have come!”
“That’s good,” said the figure with a glance over the rim of his glasses,
still holding down the print, “make yourself at home.”
Silence.
It was what Maeterlinck calls an “active silence.” I didn’t know it
was that kind, at the time.
Don’t you remember trying, in your youth, to sit still on a haircloth
sofa during long Sunday morning prayers? Of the ache in your legs for
flight; of the hunger for air in your nostrils; of the wild, wonderful need to
stampede?
Never mind. All this belongs to the impressions that gather themselves
around those first spaces called a few minutes which were the beginnings
of the real “291.”
For eight months I had the privilege of really being at home there.
There the deeps within deeps of people, pictures, conditions and myself
were revealed.
I grew to understand why the Fellows of the Photo-Secession might not
use the sign of the Golden Sun as a commercial ear tag, when it stood for
an ideal.
Why and how Camera Work is an heroic labor of love, and a monument
to the beauty, through Photography, not the glorification of the individual,
of the impatient pastime of the Man behind It.
Of the Friend of the Man who put up, out of his own pocket, money for
a three years’ lease that the Little Gallery might keep its home.
This same friend of the Man, did lovely gum-platinum prints, and yet the Man said, when I asked questions:

"When he does something worth while, something that is an expression of himself—no one else—it will be time for them in Camera Work."

Another time, after going over many folios of photographs, my own among them, I said, "I hoped when I first came, that you would show some of my things. Now I'm deadly afraid you will."

"Why?" asked the Man.

"Because," I answered, "the longer I look at the intelligent beauty of the work in these folios, the muddier and hotter looking my sepia bromides grow. How did you ever care to show them?"

The Man's short gray moustache twitched. He shuffled reams of papers, magazines, and envelopes.

I had begun to think he hadn't heard the question, or perhaps forgotten. Then he adjusted for the hundredth time, with thumb and finger his pince-nez glasses and glancing over the edges of them said, staccato—

"The way you did them was rotten, but they were a new note—they were worth while."

Then he walked out of the liliputian room, and I sat humped up on the arm of the big chair and stared down Fifth Avenue, trying to focus the unarrested lens of my thoughts.

"Rotten—but worth while."

I was beginning to understand!

Nothing in this place was final (nothing ever is) but things that stayed for a time were worth while.

Even the parting of the ways of the Secession as a body had begun.

It was one of my gifts of the gods, that I met in those little rooms with their sunny gloom, nearly all of the Fellows.

As the color fragments in a kaleidoscope keep to a pattern with small changes for a time, so these Fellows shaped and clustered around the Man and the Little Gallery.

Then as in the kaleidoscope, full gravity has played its part, and the colors have been thrown into new forms—more beautiful perhaps than the old pattern, but all within the same cycle—some colors closer, some further away.

This little place, the Man in back of it, the Fellows in back of him and yet shoulder to shoulder, stand for one of the great storm centres of my life.

This was four years ago.

Maybe some who read this, and who have been in the Little Galleries will wonder where all the "amber-gloom" is.

Perhaps, after all, there was only one pane of dusty yellow glass overhead in one of the rooms; but you remember how Hans Christian Andersen, in his boyhood, used to put his mother's blue kitchen apron over a gooseberry bush, and then sit under it and dream through the color? That color glows all through his fairy tales.
You remember, too, the long steep trails that lead zig-zag, mile after mile, away from trees and brooks, up, up into the heat of rocks blessed by the sun, where your lungs ache and your heart hurts from the struggle—and then you find it—the Vision!—the glory of the things beyond.

The memory and the wonder of it goes with you to the lowlands, into the daily life, and you are glad that you had the courage.

This is something of what the Number means to me.

**Anne Brigman**

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**291**

I sewed and hemmed and hung the first curtains for "291." Since then others have hemmed and hawed and hung there: but never with more appreciation than I, for so large a spirit in so small a space. The curtains have long since gone to the rag-man—but my appreciation for the spirit of "291" is still unfrayed!

**Clara Steichen**
TWO-NINE-ONE—A LONDONER’S VIEW

Two-Nine-One made me think of many things. Perhaps that is Two-Nine-One’s main function—to make people think. Merely to be a place wherein the emotions are agreeably stirred was not, as I understand him, what Two-Nine-One’s founder intended it to be. My conception of the Little Gallery is that it was meant less as an exhibition room in which we might wallow in the waves of Beauty sent forth from the pictures on the walls than as a treasure-chamber where—while deriving the sensuous pleasure obtainable from abstract loveliness—we might enrich ourselves also from a hoard of ideas which would be the capital of enterprises quite concrete and not a bit “soulful” in the outcome.

When I came over to New York for a short trip from London I observed that the chief difference, on the face of it, between America and Europe is that the former is enthusiastic and the latter isn’t. In Europe we are tired of enthusiasms, even tired of art. This is a shocking thing. We might as well say we are tired of being alive. But, however shocking, it is true—for indeed we are not very much even alive. It is especially amongst literary and artistic people that this tiredness is noticeable. We have a class here who, if they are interested in anything, are interested in literature—but to all intents and purposes have given up reading books. We have the picture-lovers—who never go inside a gallery. We have the drama-connoisseurs: it is only with infinite labour that they can be coaxed into a theatre, and when you have got them there you only bore them. The bookman reads nothing but reviews; the pictureman scrutinizes nothing but the script of the Private View cards stacked on his desk; the playgoer sees nothing but the critiques in the papers.

This sounds like simply stating that we are blasé. And we are blasé. However, the blaséness is but a symptom of a deeper disease, the disease of inertia. We don’t care—and we don’t care largely because, having overindulged our emotions when we first awoke to art, literature, the drama, etc., we did not simultaneously check all those emotions by the light of reason. Had we—instead of passively enjoying beauty like animals enjoying being tickled—kept our intellectual faculties hard at work also, we should still have been alive. As it is, we have hardly any life left, and even the subtlest tickling cannot make us twitch.

So we look across at America a little superciliously, perceiving the American still able to purr or weep or go into ecstasies in response not only to skilled tickling but to almost any tickling. The superciliousness is silly: is indeed a European vice, a priggishness for which alone we deserve our fate of fatigue. Myself, I admired, in America, that aliveness which makes for every kind of generous appreciation, even of the emptier performances in the arts. For I had rather a man indulged in the most sentimental emotionalism than that he were too dead to savour any emotions, too paralytic to “feel.” But it soon became evident to me that although New York was enormously more alive in such respects than London, even in New York there had begun to appear considerable signs of that tiredness-amongst-the-cultured which makes art such an affair of yawnings in certain apparently artistic circles in London.
And now we return to Two-Nine-One. Thither I repaired in due course. I had not crossed the threshold of a picture gallery for months, except to examine exhibitions of photographs, with which I happen to have a special concern. (Photographers, moreover, have not had time to grow tired of photography. At least, not very.) The last time I had visited a collection of paintings I had found them housed in an edifice whose pillars were of marble and whose atrium was ornamented with a fountain which made me think of harems and expensive restaurants. Vistas of costly canvases stretched as far as eye could reach in every direction, and the only objects in sight which looked as though they would not provoke a headache were the occasional art-students, happy—and often flirting—behind the easels on which stood their endeavours to be unoriginal (or, more praiseworthy, to make money). So I envisaged picture galleries as domains of a dreadful dignity, terrible as tombs, a godsend only to their architects, to building-contractors, and to the vendors (whoever they may be) of the material from which marble pillars are manufactured.

Dignified—that is what most galleries are. Lo, Two-Nine-One wasn’t an atom dignified. Item the first: not only was Two-Nine-One non-dignified, but its atmosphere did not demand that its visitor should be dignified either. Thus, instead of having to think about himself and his own demeanour (which is the curse of dignity) he was freed to think about other things.

How to make him think? That, of course, is the secret of Two-Nine-One’s creator. It is contrived somehow: this is all we are aware of. We go into Two-Nine-One, and incidentally enjoy (or hate) the pictures; but the real benefit is not so much in the enjoyment or hatred—good though this may be for the soul—as in the circumstance that, emerging, we find ourselves a-simmer with ideas. And not a marble pillar was required for the cure! No vistas, here, of headaches; no soothing splash of fountains; just a small room, a trifle shabby, with some pictures—queer, wrong-headed, wonderful, devastatingly new, disconcertingly old, exasperating, adorable, simple, complex, obvious, incomprehensible or what not. And Monsieur the Director, who possibly retains and suffers the headaches which everybody else ought to go away with but doesn’t.

What does it all amount to? To answer that would be like defining what Two-Nine-One “stands for” or “means”: those maddeningly woolly verbs which journalists (as I know, for I am one) have coined to escape exactitude. As well reply to the eager inquirer who would fain be told whether Two-Nine-One is “making good”! Two-Nine-One is like one of those minute specks which a scientist shows you, protoplasm or cell or seed or whatever it is, which guard the something in them, life, by virtue whereof they grow or subdivide and increase and multiply—or sprout into a plant with frail swaying blossoms of beauty but a sturdy stem. It is all very miraculous, but it cannot occur in a vacuum. The plant draws its sustenance from outside: only from inside comes the power of its chemistry to transform that sustenance into the flowers or fruit. Now it is the same with Two-Nine-One. It is immensely in touch with the world—at least, so it
seemed to me. In most great cities you could unearth odd little studios and galleries, as shabby as Two-Nine-One and as gloriously devoid of marble pillars, where the cranky exhibit their crankiness and the strange and the novel and the weird and the down-with-the-bourgeois hold their court. But most of these retreats (though God forbid that we should sneer at them, for they are often the haunt of true martyrs in the cause) are backwaters aside from the main current. That what their art has to say attracts no audience may be a pity; but even were the audience to arrive it would be fed with but poor, thin food. For the great Purveyor of Ideas is one who not only lives en rapport with his audience, but actually derives half his force from them: he takes their life and having transmuted it hands it back to them. At Two-Nine-One this is seen visibly in action. The idealess enters. Pictures are seen, words exchanged. And behold, the idealess discovers not that he has been forcibly gagged and stuffed with ideas, but that in absorbing some ideas he has found that he already possessed quite a lot of his own and is capable of manufacturing more, endlessly. Departing, he leaves some of them behind. Monsieur the Director has captured them. He catches and gives a show to passing ideas as he catches and gives a show to passing pictures. Nothing is entombed at Two-Nine-One; nothing expires because of a vacuum; nothing is frozen by dignity.

It came to pass that in the office of the staidest of American monthly magazines the Art Editor, with whom I was wasting an hour in the manner known, the world over, as a hasty business chat, said to me: “You must go and see the Photo-Secession Gallery.” It is true that he gave me its address wrongly, as a result of the vagueness that is apparently a gift without which no Art Editor can become an Art Editor (and I already knew the right address, and had been there, which was more than he had); but what was significant in the incident was that in this office they had heard of Two-Nine-One at all. Two-Nine-One is not, to New York, what any art gallery, grand or modest, is to London. To say that it is celebrated is insufficient: plenty of such phenomena are celebrated for their absurdity or their daring alone. Two-Nine-One can—in some people’s view—manage the absurd and the daring, but it exists on neither, is known not because it advertises but more because it refrains from advertising. When I walked in I gained the impression that other people walked in for the same reason that I did, not because to stay away would be to remain outside the pale of a “movement” (for we are all cute enough nowadays to keep aloof from “movements”) but because to stay away would be to miss a treat. That, it would seem, ought to apply too to going to an intellectual play or reading the latest clever book: to shirk the theatre or to fail to buy the book is to miss a treat. Well, we don’t care. It is with a weary sigh of self-indulgence that we miss such treats. The treat at Two-Nine-One is of another sort which brings me back to where I started. The reason we don’t read or look at pictures or go to the theatre is not, at bottom, altogether our fault: it is the fault of the deadness of most books and most pictures and most plays. Somehow—that’s the secret!—the things at Two-Nine-One are not dead as the (superficially) simi-
lar things elsewhere are dead. It is because Monsieur the Director is not
dead, and consequently attracts, almost automatically, the work and the
people who are also not dead. So it turns out that we, of the nearly-dead
brigade, crawling skeptically into Two-Nine-One, find ourselves revivified,
and suddenly learn with gladness that all kinds of subjects (even Art!) are
more interesting than we had supposed. And once more we start upon the
almost forgotten task of using our brains—of thinking.
Sept. 18, 1914.

Ward Muir

WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

It is very hard to put into words the feeling which I have for the place.
I know that it draws me in quite a different way from that in which I
know that any other place draws me. I go and go again when I am in town;
and just recently when I returned after an absence of two years, the wish
to go to "291" was one of the strongest feelings which I recognized. I dis­
inctly miss my little visits when I am where I cannot make them.

What is it which draws me so strongly?
I am sure it is not just the exhibition which is on. Sometimes I do not
understand the things I see. And yet I go and go again, even though I do
not understand, in the hope of getting in touch with the spirit of the artist
that I may gain expansion of spirit myself.

It is not just Mr. Stieglitz; for sometimes I do not see him;—though
I do always feel the presence of his sincerity and fearlessness.

It is not just that I often meet friends there; tho that is one of the
delightful possibilities.

Nor is it that I sometimes meet new people who I feel are harmonious
to me.

It is all these things together which make the atmosphere of the place;—
the Spirit of the place. Yes, I feel sure that as nearly as I can put it:

"Tis the call of spirit to spirit;
Subtle and sweet and strong.
"Tis the wonderful call of the human,—
As clear as if voiced in song!

Abby Hedge Corvell
"Toil and trouble! Fire burn and cauldron bubble," yes, and yammer and crash and crunch and crowd and rush, and puff and wheeze and yell and curse and sob—that's New York, Metropolis of the New World, Greatest Little Spot on the Globe—so they say.

I don't believe it.

I don't believe it because I have found a little place where none of the above effervescences come to soil the soul with their fetid neurasthenias or fuss the mind with their cacophonous trepidations. This spot I've found is as shut from that whirling outer turmoil as though it were not. It has none of the noise, none of the trouble, none of the glare and glitter. This little spot is quietude exquisite, sober-colored unto chastity, modest as the haunt of a garden wren, yet withal, cheery as a desert's oasis ending a day's journey. Indeed, it is most like an oasis. And the master of the oasis is always there to let down little silver buckets into the deep well of his soul and bring up good cheer, and, with the soothing salaam only Prophets and True Believers ever possess, proffer drink more precious than wine, counsel more endearing than the sages of dead saints, and love more gentle than the caress of twilight.

Is there one to say that amidst this travail of souls gone awry in the riot of mechanism, such a spot is not needed? Show me such a one, and I will point you a man whose soul is so blasted and shriveled and withered that a dead, dry leaf would gleam like a jewel beside it.

Out there, the street boils and hurries and scrambles past in an utter fury of haste. Within this spot I know, nothing boils nor hurries nor scrambles. Out there people and things and events make a great fuss and stir as if they were going somewhere, and that when they got to this somewhere, something awaited them. So great is their fuss and stir, so thick the froth of their comings and goings, and yellings and talkings, that one wonders over-much what it is that could await them. Wondering long and long, one comes to deny the importance of their haste, and denies too the value of their goal.

Time is fleeting, 'tis said.

But all things come, and all things go, only a thing of beauty remains forever.

There are many kinds of people; people who haggle in market places; people who look wise as they ponder over their books of law, delivering their wisdoms at so much per annum; people who gather and moil over petty accounts of petty happenings amidst a petty folk, and when, each day, they have gathered and moiled over enough of this pettiness, they pour it into a mould and call it "news"; and people there are who labor hard over the making of things in quantity, and when they have the total figures on all they have made, are filled with a great pride in their figures, translating the whole wide world into figures—and even, oh sorrow of sorrows, even invading the Kingdom of the Spirit with their figures.
Oh, the dross of it, the unspeakable agonizing soiled crush of their world of figures and news and wisdoms and market-place hagglings! Fish-frauen!

But in this little oasis of the spirit I have found in my wanderings, there are none of these noisome things or qualities or events. They are not missed; they are not wanted. The sheik of this oasis has placed a symbol on the brink of the sands: “Abandon masks, all ye who enter here.” Thus, out of this desert called New York, there is yet a single spot where the soul of a man may come forth unafraid, inviolate.

Such an oasis unto which the soul may escape in a moment out of the journey, fleeing the desert’s sirocco, hiding from the fangs of creeping creatures, is “291.” But why rhapsodize about it? It is known to those who, searching the desert through for an unspoiled spot, saw and claimed it for their own. Known also is the guardian of the springs, the keeper of the cup of good cheer, the muezzin of modernity.

*Ave, Loca immortalis: We about to live salute thee!*

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**291**

It was a sufficiently terrible thing when the inmates of Dr. Goujon’s private asylum succeeded in overmastering their keepers and acquired control of the establishment. There is no more horrible story in fiction, but on a small scale a still more terrible thing has happened in New York if in the fury of life anyone could wait to see. Terrible because so small and helpless, terrible because so rare and incredible among nations that believe in themselves.

At 291 Fifth Avenue in one small centre a perfectly sane man acquired control of a gallery and opened its door to the public. He has seen through the dreams of dreamers, overmastered the impulses which drive one to politics, another to the academy, and another to gaol. He has seen that the kingdom of Heaven is within you, that the earth is perfectly suited to express any imaginable bliss that matter can fulfil, and that there is time for the Soul. But he has seen that the myriads who pass his threshold are without part in the kingdoms of their heavens, and that for the shoddiest reasons.

Primarily, “291” was a Photo-Secession, a revolt from the degradation of one form of creative art, but it has long ceased to be only that. There is only one Freedom born of the perception of Truth, and there is but one possibility of attaining it: liberty to look for it.

Alfred Stieglitz has the colloquial habit of saying, “Well, say, I’ll tell you.” But the astonishing thing is that he tells you such things that the half-born thought in your soul utters its first cry. He is a dreamer not because he is undeveloped in other directions, his practical ability is not questioned by those who know him, but his practice astonishes those who do not
understand that there are things worth striving for beyond the commercial article, human or inanimate, that is produced by the world machine. His dream is the only Reality.

To him come many strangers who have a wave of the sea in their hearts, timidly, incredulously. They speculate upon the reason of his attitude, his resources, principally because money is the keynote of most men’s character, the motive if not the only result. But what he means to them, and Alfred Stieglitz, the Photo-Secession, liberty of action and of desire are synonymous, is the possibility of their own dreams coming true. In life you may be a tramp and be perfectly respectable, you may be respectable without forfeiting his respect. In art you may make bad photographs for sale, or magazine covers for the Metropolitan, but you shall not believe yourself to be a creator in art. You shall not deceive yourself or him that in preferring worldly comforts to martyrdom you are doing a particularly noble work for the regeneration of mankind. What an artist might regard as crime may be pardonable; Stieglitz measures men by the weight of their sincerity, the motive behind the crime or the creation. There are many paintings and drawings by various men to be seen at “291” that have never and may never be seen elsewhere. Who knows what this man may develop into? I have seen his past work, I know the man is honest, what right have I to say his picture is bad? I may not admire it myself, but he is not trying to imitate anybody; he is seeking something, trying to express himself. Such a man should have a chance to show his work whether it is complete or not. It may happen that someone will see his work here and appreciate it. If not, no harm is done.

Is novelty then the chief goal of “291”? Perhaps it is, in a sense, but it must be new novelty. Is there nothing new under the sun? The gallery can remain unhung and Stieglitz will not despair about it. What he shows, you may see, but you are not compelled to look at. You are not invited to buy, and if you should, Stieglitz will not be demonstrative in his joy. He is glad for your sake, for the artist’s sake, pleased to have been the intermediary between you, but he is not interested in profit nor appalled by loss—the standards of life are different in this gallery. Those who frequent it come there to rest and gain strength to get the stream of lunatics outside under better control, or to awaken in them again the ideals they forgot when they arrived at years of discretion.

There are those who say, “The man’s mad, he only thinks he’s sane—I’m sane,” as who should say, “Poor chap, he thinks he’s a teapot, so sad, now I’m the only authentic teapot!”

But there are many who remember the longings of their green days, whose eyes fill with tears as they admit he is right. “You do it,” they say “go on but I—I daren’t.”

They are glad, however, to know that the doors of “291” are open—glad to know that such a place exists somewhere.

Stephen Haweis
and I wandered aimlessly in the dark, utterly alone and it was very bitter. And I was numbed by a great tumult into what seemed the stillness of death. But presently above the terrible din, I heard a voice inviting “Abandon soap all ye who enter here” and I straightway thought “Me for that, I haven’t any anyway” and although the voice seemed afar off, nevertheless it was a living voice, so thitherward I bent my steps. And as I approached, the voice waxed louder and continued “Come washed or come unwashed, take off your things and stay awhile, and let us see what you are really like or keep them on and stay awhile and—if you can—see what we are really like. Don’t come at all if you don’t want to, but we’re here anyway and you’re welcome. It doesn’t matter whether you are clean or unclean so long as you are living, and if you are living, you are altogether likely to need soap in spots but that is none of our darn business, and I guess we can stand it if you can.” And I became aware of a great scrambling and jostling, and I thought it must be a “movie” show with drinks and pictures free to all, and with a great effort, worthy of such a goal, I strove, but I was jostled this way and that, and I was in dire peril of being trampled underfoot, until presently in my blind struggling, I burst through the crowd, fell prone and lay still. After a space, being somewhat recovered, I stirred and looked about me, and found myself in a little entrance, quiet, and alone, while the noisy noisome jostling horde swept by. And I was in the lowest depths of despair, and as I could not look any lower—and yet still wanted to look—perforce I looked around me and above, and a strange peace came over me, the which, however, was quickly dispelled, as the realization came to me (I know not by what manner of means) that from the distance, I had not heard aright, and that it was spelled with an “H”. Nevertheless I was glad, because had I heard aright, my courage would never have brought me thus far, and I should have vaporied away in utter darkness. But now as the deceit of my ears was set aright, again, even as before, I said “Me for that, I haven’t any anyway” and straightway I arose and went in.

And I became aware, even as I entered, that what had seemed to me to be, was not, and that neither soap nor hope would avail me, and I understood the meaning of the bidding. And out of the mists, dimly, but in living fire, before me shone HOPE. And there were quiet forceful voices about me, that were indubitably living voices, and there was the deep solace of sympathy and understanding, and I was no more alone. And

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Rex Stovel
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

Each is ill with his own malady. And there are, happily, as many maladies as there are humans. Yours may be a craze to bite a bit of the moon. No one knows why—you, yourself, least of all. But that it is something which has eaten its way throughout the sum total of you, you know. At times, you are discouraged. You say, I am a no-good. I am not like others. I eat, drink, sleep, breathe this bite-a-bit-o’-the-moon. Nobody else does. What use am I? Let me die.

No, let me not die. There might be some hospital, some nurse, some spirit who would soothe me back to health, to my belief in this bite-a-bit, without which I am somebody else, and being somebody else, do not wish to be. Then you remember somewhere. You smile. A funny worm is tickling you. And you go there.

There may be six pictures on a wall. Six pictures about onions. They say something to you. Or there may be six words spoken by some one to some one. Six words about capon being more palatable than chicken. They, too, say something to you.

Go ahead. Try again. We believe in you and your bit of the moon. ’Tis the only craze worth while. Bite away. And you return home, the happiest invalid that ever was. You are not a no-good. That night, you nearly break your neck trying to reach the moon. And for many nights thereafter, and days, as well. Until you have to go somewhere again.

That is what “291” means to me.

ALFRED KREYMBORG

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WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

It is the most helpful place to be in for anyone whose mind is open to suggestion. There is no feeling of smallness there. Frank, honest criticism of a constructive kind always. No subject is too small to be ignored, no idea is too great not to find a response. All kinds of people go and come. If you go there often enough you will find just how big or how small you are. Sometimes the awakening comes as a shock. But after all it is an oasis in the desert of American ideas.

FRANCIS BRUGUIÈRE
291

A place where I can think aloud without fear of being misunderstood.

Ethel Montgomery Andrews

291 has weight and direction—and if you have any balance yourself you will find that these two hold the equilibrium. Just above your scale of mental capacity you will find the man who speaks, with great clarity of vision. If you are able you can look beyond, when you have passed through “291” to a realization of the vital beauty of today. The beauty of modern direction seen in a fire escape (through the final window of 291) + the weight contrast of modern structure.

Frances Simpson Stevens

291 is the Attic near the Roof. It is nearer the roof than any other attic in the world.

There insomnia is not a malady—it is an ideal.

Djuna Barnes
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

It is often most difficult to write about the very things which mean most to us and I have long deferred writing what “291” means to me because of my consciousness of the inadequacy of anything I might say to express why or how I have benefited from my association of seven years with “291.”

“291,” in spite of its reputation to the contrary, makes no propaganda. It teaches nothing, for the professorial attitude is contrary to its spirit. It is made up of heterogeneous elements, representing conflicting and irreconcilable points of view with all of which no one man could ever agree. It holds exhibitions but it is not an art gallery. Exhibitions are to “291” what illustrations are to a book, and who could claim knowledge of the contents of a book from a glance at or even a study of its illustrations? As I recall the heated discussions around the lunch table, which is as much a part of “291” as the little exhibition room; my sometimes passive listening, and often violent opposition; the exhibitions which irritated as often as they satisfied me; the articles in Camera Work which I often delighted in picking to pieces; I stop and ask myself “What did I receive from ‘291’ that is of value to me?” Why do I return day after day to discussions when I know I will never bring my opponent to my point of view nor will he convert me to his? Why do I study and analyze works which I would not care to own? Why do I approve of the exhibition of works which irritate me beyond measure? What has “291” given me? I can find but one thing which it has given me: “Opportunity.” The priceless treasures which I got from “291” I went and took, for there is no policeman at the door of “291,” there are no patents, no copyrights. Any passerby may enter and dump his intellectual baggage, good, bad or indifferent in the common heap; and anybody may take what he pleases from the common stock and make it his own. Nothing is labeled, nothing is classified. You must rely on your own judgment to discern what is of value to you, and whether you receive much or little or nothing depends not on what is offered to you but on what you appropriate. Nobody will raise a cry of “stop thief” because each one knows that whatever anyone takes he takes because he really wants it and will endeavor to make it bear interest and all will participate in the return. For, strange to say, no miser has ever been attracted to “291” and, without anything being said or done to discountenance any individual’s presence, those who aim at “cornering” an intellectual commodity do not seem to feel at home at “291.” What we can take at “291” will enrich us without making anybody the poorer for it. What we give will take nothing from our stores.
“291” is to me a modern “Cour des Miracles” where kings can be found in beggars’ clothes, a laboratory where human beings as well as their productions may be mere subjects for experiment and analysis, and where investigators of life can find the richest material at their disposition. It gives opportunity to those who want to give and to those who want to receive. But how do we know who gives or who receives for he who thinks he gives, often receives more than he gives, and he who thinks he is only taking, may have given without knowing.

Have I given any idea of what “291” means to me? Perhaps not. How could I? It has meant something different, something new, every time I have come in contact with it. It will continue to mean new things to me for it is alive. There is but one definite thing which I can always depend on finding there: Opportunity.

Paul B. Haviland

BETWEEN FOUR AND FIVE

The fore-noon had been this and that. The after-noon dragged through an exhibition or two, a saloon or two,—some art talk.

Then, somehow,—tired and discouraged, we found ourselves at Fisk’s suggestion, in a place, a gallery, that, I like the word place better than the word gallery, for this place.

“May we see the new Picasso?”

It was brought into the room. A Picasso.

That was a moment.

“What does it mean?”—even with that felt by someone in the room, it was a moment.

Again the fore-noon had been this and that. Again the after-noon had been given to this and that,—had been wasted.

“Let us go in here,”—and we went in again to the place which is more that than gallery,—just a place in movement; just—rather, one of the few.

The walls this time were emotionally hung with African carvings,—there was also yellow and orange and black; yellow, orange, black. There were photographs of African carvings. There was a photograph of two hands. That was a moment.

“Let us start a magazine,—a gallery,—a theatre”: This is always in the air; seldom: “Let me create a moment.”

“What is he trying to say?”

C. Demuth
291

It is like a straight line rising, a line of living red, rising above gray formlessness, and other straight lines run towards the big, straight, rising line at many angles. Some almost run parallel, others melt gradually into it: some meet it at right angles; others cross it like the slash of a sword. Towards the bottom, some undefined lines of insipid colors, but only few. But all is rising, is straight—but not the line of least resistance.

Konrad Cramer

Two Ninety One” was the original impulse of my going into the modern world of art. I had been going around and seeing the conventional pictures of the day, and in a superficial way had been very enthusiastic about them. Then I happened at “291” and saw an exhibition of Water-Colors by John Marin which quite startled me at first, but held me and left me eager for a second view.

Aside from the pictures, the attitude of Mr. Stieglitz toward art and life made a deep impression upon me. I felt that here was one pursuing an idea for the idea’s sake.

After seeing a number of exhibitions at 291, to my astonishment, many of the old type of pictures that had interested me, left me cold and indifferent. All of this was done subconsciously. And now that I come to think of it, 291 has meant much more to me than I had realized, and it seems that this exhibition of John Marin was an important event in my life.

Charles Daniel

As to “291”, it means a place where new ideas are received without prejudice, with a sincere searching for truth. Its teaching is that we must always live in the present and future, never be hopeless because of the greatness of the past, but love and reverence it for all it has given us that is alive and vital.

Anna C. Pellew
“291”—a positive electron ever ready to use its powerful dynamic force for the destruction of the deadly microbe. Being positive, it cannot be isolated—tho it stands alone. It is a strain centre in stable orbital motion round a common centre—recognizable and identified.

The electric waves produced are circulated by Heat, Friction and Action, or, if you will, Passion, Thought, and Expression. The works shown at “291” are comets which go on their way with all strength and never make apologies, even if their tails should strike the earth. Shock absorbers are not necessary, nor are they desired.

At this generating station there is high pressure, strongly felt by those who are susceptible to messages of passionate spontaneity, by those true selves and not borrowed selves, by those who are capable of feeling that “291” breathes and lives and who enter into its consciousness, the centre of which is unconscious, by those whose sight can pass into vision, by those who can see the clearness of opacity and the clearness of the obscure, by those who are elemental. These are the conductors of the electric waves.

And so the wheel turns on throwing off its electric sparks—the force acting upon the atom and the soul acting upon force. The circle has returned upon itself.

A natural force is this electron, synonymous with life, synonymous with “291”.

HELEN R. GIBBS

I have been invited to say what “291” means to me. It means to me a personality—that mainly. On my infrequent visits to New York I am drawn invariably to “291.” I go not to see the latest extravagance in pictorial expression, but to hear, be inspired by a Man, and to breathe the wholesome atmosphere of “291.” Association, however brief, with one who is the soul of sincerity and disinterestedness, who exudes enthusiasm, is healthful. So I feel. As I conceive it “291” is a quite natural development or evolution of the Photo-Secession. The Photo-Secession was this Man as much as “291” is this Man. The Photo-Secession had a purpose and mission which have been accomplished. “291” is but attempting to add to that accomplishment a supplementary one. I do not pretend to say that I understand, and of course, therefore, cannot appreciate the aesthetic intention of the majority of the originators of the paintings and drawings exhibited at “291” in recent years. Many have indicated certainly, “a great struggling to express” which to one sympathetically inclined has seemed at times distressingly painful and pathetic. No doubt it is I who am unseeing that is deserving of pity. But all this has no direct relation to my intense interest in and real regard for “291,” its aims and ideals.

In a World, where even Art is prostituted to commercialism, it is good to know of one spot where this taint is not.

H. MORTIMER LAMB
WHAT IS 291?

Gertrude Stein once asked me that question. I told her as best I could, but I do not remember telling her adequately. Since that she has learned herself more of its character and personality, for it has served her in quite a similar way it has served so many of us who but for its interests and faith might have continued unnoticed way out of time. When I think of what America has been with “291” I am thinking how strange it would have been without it. It stands unique—by itself. There is nothing anywhere—not in Europe even—that is the equivalent of it. In Germany here there is, of course, the Blaue Reiter which has for its object quite the same end, otherwise there is nothing—not London, not Paris—and I am definitely certain not any other public beside the American in general or the New Yorker in particular knows of such an institution if this it may be called—as “291.”

It is difficult to know what the insider can say of “291,” for if he speak at all he is in danger of being—carefully putting it—over interested. We know how often it has been denounced as ridiculous, how for long it was considered by some as merely a pose—a kind of aesthetic affectation. It can now be seen after lapses of time and experience and direct contact with it that it no longer appears to any one as that ridiculous, and that, through a fairer increase of tolerance and understanding many who once denounced are now paying tribute more creditably. How it has dispensed with and made absurd that feeble notion of the old gallery and dealer, by exposing at once those who have appeared over its horizon as showing if not completely, at least fragmentary signs of genuineness of talent or it might be genius, and in nearly every instance how fair has been its eyesight, its judgment and how unfailing its desire to be so. It has been and still is a kind of many headed creature standing firm for every variety of truth and every variety of expression of the same. It has insisted since its birth and to its end is certain to insist on that one essential, the tabooed “sincerity.” It has paid severe toll for this ideal, precisely as any ideal pays heavily for the pursuance of its desires, and the survival is splendid. It has come of age and has shown intelligence from the day of its birth. It has doubtless committed many of the so-called errors of youth and frailty, but if there have been errors there has been likewise life and earnestness in them. I do not as I say know what any one can say about “291.” Those who know it with real intimacy speak seldomly about it actually, though often of it, naturally. It is gratifying enough that there is now at least some degree of spiritual sustenance achieved in the full faith of those who know it well on that side of the ocean and of the pleasure that is expressed in the knowledge of its work on this side. It is known in all quarters as a factor in the development of modern art; it has literally contributed to the vigorous growth of that. It has served the ideal and served it without qualification other than the one of earnestness of purpose. Those who have not known it intimately or well have from time to time with delight indulged in petty blasphemy or in a fiercer scorn with here and there an incredible
contempt. It may be this has all been justified just as the praises of it are with certainty more justified. It has served its purpose wherever and when it has been privileged to do so, and regretted when it has been denied. It has created and fulfilled its unique and specialized function, that of bringing to the view fairly and without ostent and as completely as conditions have allowed, the artistic searchings of individuals and through its generosity and faith has brought freely before a fairly curious public, the work of artists in various fields of expression who have by reason of this originality for long been excommunicated from the main body both in America and in Europe.

I should like to have intimated more adequately just what “291” means, has meant all along its career and will continue as long as it survives. If I have even insinuated even so vaguely what it has meant to the insider who has found it to be his artistic savior, I shall perhaps have said something of it. It can only, I think, be really intimated what this number has meant to that place in the universe. It can be said, however, that there will always be a strange and invaluable significance in this “291.” It has in any event served the mystical purpose of establishing fair values in place of unfair; of pure appreciation in place of contempt, and with regard to itself especially, a genuine faith in place of suspicion too long alert and attentive. It has too well proved at this time its purpose and its efficiency and its readiness to serve where it finds service possible, has long since become one of the little miracles of our day. A pure instrument is certainly sure to give forth pure sound, so has this instrument of “291” kept itself as pure as possible that it might thereby give out pure expression. I think never has a body of individuals—large or small—kept its head more clear, or its hands and feet freer of the fetter of personal gain or group malice than has this “291” body. It has come well of age and its maturity is gratifying. Certainly to the insider and certainly it will sooner or later certify itself in the minds of everyone who has had or will have even so great or even so slight an interest in progressive modern tendencies toward individual expression. This is certainly what “291” is.

Berlin, July 4, 1914.
DEAR STIEGLITZ:

I am sorry I cannot write a fitting appreciation of the modern elixir you are giving America—your foresight has gripped the imagination of the country with the vitality and eloquence of the vocational movement in art.

Faithfully,

ARTHUR B. DAVIES

October 27, 1914.

291

The question, "What is '291'?" leaves one in the same position in explaining it as the modern painter is in explaining his painting. The modern painting does not present any definite object. Neither does "291" represent any definite movement in one direction, such as Socialism, Suffrage, etc. Perhaps it is these movements having but one direction that makes life at present so stuffy and full of discontent.

There could be no "291ism." "291" takes a step further and stands for orderly movement in all directions; in other words it is what the observer sees in it—an idea to the nth power.

One means used at "291" has been a process of elimination of the non-essential. This happens to be one of the important principles in modern art; therefore "291" is interested in modern art.

It was not created to promote modern art, photography, nor modern literature. That would be a business and "291" is not a shop.

It is not an organization that one may join. One either belongs or does not.

It has grown and outgrown in order to grow. It grew because there was a need for such a place, yet it is not a place.

Not being a movement, it moves, so do "race horses," and some people, and "there are all sorts of sports," but no betting. It is finer to find than to win.

This seems to be "291" or is it Stieglitz?

ARTHUR G. DOVE
An arena for disembodied souls; for star dust, molecules, animalcula.
House of crying dust and living winds.
An up-side-down house; idealistic backward and reformatory; builded upon empty space between existences as a Forum for speechless life essence.
Place for utterance of unformable thoughts; for cries of cosmic labour.
Birthplace of psychic electrons. Fountain of Youth. Phænix nest.
To enter is to leave life; to rest, to rejuvenate; to remain is decay.

JOHN W. BREYFOGLE

About six or seven years ago I heard a lecture at the Art Students League—I think it was by Albert Sterner—and in the course of the lecture he mentioned “291” Fifth Avenue. He spoke of weird drawings such as any child could do, and groups of long-haired individuals who stood around and raved about them. While he was talking, I jotted down “291,” “Stieglitz,” and decided to go the next morning and see for myself.

I rode up in the tiny elevator and entered the little gallery. The quiet light was full of a soothing mystic feeling and around the room, and on the square under glass in the middle of the room, I looked at what I now know were Matisse drawings. I was all alone and I stood and absorbed the atmosphere of the place and of the drawings. They had no meaning to me as Art as I then knew Art, but the feeling I got from them still clings to me and always will. It was the feeling of a bigger, deeper, more simple and archaic world. I stood long and absorbed “291”—the quiet, peaceful little room, the strange and wonderful life revealed to me and the square-faced, bushy-haired man with penetrating eyes that swayed in and swayed out of the doorway. I left feeling I had seen something living, something that would live with me, and that has lived with me. For now after an absence of three years I have visited “291” very often and to me it is a wonderful living place palpitating with red blood—a place to which people bring their finest and that brings out the finest that is within all those that come in actual contact with it.

WILLIAM ZORACH
THE SPIRIT OF 291

O mortals quaking, ... hear!
What Fear entrapping leads ye all astray?
’Tis, when solely guarded by an Hymnal, ...
Falteringly, must take—!

Excessive watching rends the tensèd Bow—?
Nay! The marksman, sure,—
Looks, leaps and triumphs;
Followed e’er by a vision
Indomitable ———
To the swaying spar of misconcept——!

Hail all,— who in strength to conquer
Conquers solely th’ aim of Divine Poise—!
For in conquering thus, ........
’Tis with a hand outstretched
’T’universal helping, ..... helping most
The sanctioned—Best in All—!

VELIDA

ZU 291

ZUM ERSTEN: Ich finde in “291” den Geist der stets bejaht.
ZUM ZWEITEN: Ich finde dort die moralische Negation des unmoralischen amerikanischen Geldsucht.
ZUM Dritten: Ich finde dort nicht den armen Reichtum, doch die reiche Armut.

MAX MERZ
Direktor der Elizabeth Duncan Schule

TO 291

Firstly: I find in “291” the spirit of affirmation.
Secondly: I find there the moral negative of the immoral American Goldhunt.
Thirdly: I do not find there the poverty of Riches, but the riches of Poverty.
291

An oasis of real freedom—
A sturdy Islet of enduring independence in the besetting seas of Commercialism and Convention—
A rest—when wearied
A stimulant—when dulled
A Relief—
A Negation of Preconceptions
A Forum for Wisdom and for Folly
A Safety valve for repressed ideas—
An Eye Opener
A Test—
A Solvent
A Victim and an Avenger.

EUGENE MEYER, JR.

291

"291" is the one place where people gather that has never become a disappointment. And to be welcome is to have a friendship that nothing can spoil.

All who come there forget, in a sense, who they are. If they don’t get this feeling of being part of a comradeship which is above prejudice, they drift off to where they are of more importance.

The things shown are like the frequenters—they test and prove each other—to think of one is to think of all.

The value of one work is never emphasized. You don’t go there to see miracles of accomplishment. But when you have been often and drawn the essence from them all, you find yourself with a standard that is worth taking any place, even into the precincts where each precious thing seems to be beyond the reach of judgment.

As long as “291” lasts I’ll always feel that an open road to the world of artists is accessible.

ARTHUR B. CARLES
The Philosophy—if any—of "291" is vivisectional. The psychology perfectly clinical. "291" A huge full blooded tolerator. A live challenger of preconceived notions. From art to potatoes: a very great generator of passion: a stern creator of an unconscious scheme that permits of organic diagnosing extremes in equally full measured spiritual terms or code: a very great squanderer of consciousness; thelivest conservator of the living thing; the biography famous, a great confessional—.

There is a certain, call it positivism, spirit of the little place, a certain, very definite yet, most difficult to put to words, mere words as such. It is probably, just where the intellect crosses, with the imaginations. From time to time, I question the license to substitute, as it were, these imaginations for intellectual somersaulting. Naturally under such spiritual "pressure" one fancies an avalanche of "objections;" still one feels the stigma, the blow of which is rather far fetching; kind of suicide; practically hastening to utter oblivion, seemingly; that, which we already have absorbed, consciously or unconsciously, which hourly constitutes higher criticism—by higher criticism I mean the "word" passed thru freer and fuller contact between the creators or painters themselves. "291" is the little rendezvous for such Confessions.

So to me, complete perfect ventilation, spiritual, is the dominant note; the one most positive after all; a sort of spiritual mart, where souls, where the individual with anything in the form of a real message, truly finds a chance to develop, to grow, to make good or sink, absolutely. "291" is a growth—.

To me—symbolically—"291" is the little craft, the lone speck on the high seas, braving, bleeding, battling and weathering hurricane upon hurricane, single; sailing, creeping and navigating at snail pace; perpetually piloting, crossing, re-crossing, broader channels, to enter, and re-enter anew upon still far greater seas, of far greater importance; eventually destined to arrive at some very positive port; of character, absolute. When the history, the true history of great living art will be written, the "log" of the little craft ought to make inspiring reading. The above thoughts constitute the meanest preamble on the subject in question, that of the little place dubbed "291." There, one breathes freer, fuller indeed, where obituary notices are read aloud—that is why I go there.

I repeat, "291" is equally as conscious as it is unconscious. Its mission—if any—is rather to intellectualize the course "sailed," to pacify to the end that permits of a pure concrete summing up, as it were, of the livest purest constituent of that which organically constitutes great living art, which basically is more or less communistic, which in turn, in reality, is life itself: "291" is not a pacifist.

"291," itself, is more the essences of first contact. Its existence is natural, and therefore a violent objector; a sane and "unsafe" tolerator of the bigger value; a huge deductor; a sterilizer of—abstractions.
Personally I have many "moments" when one feels the absolute uselessness of art which is reasonable and seasonable, as legitimate as most any other form of "positive" scepticism. Possibly the War has much to do with it—a veritable Abattoir; where human flesh is maimed madly, wrecklessly: blown to smithereens all in the name of Patriotism and "God." It is in moments as these great in themselves, that one feels the "pressure" of the big fuller spiritual values or relations, not sentimentality! When Life, Love, Art, are seemingly at a dead standstill—vanished, as it were—plus: the use we thought we had or felt, when the "dead" thing has become more alive and, vice versa, (a seemingly perpetual retrogression, a sort of give and take compromise, a ceaseless vomiter of fixed values, a vomiter of fact), (as a shadow, in that it has not gone beyond itself, symbolically "291" is the shadow).

Hell is let loose at this juncture, and here it is that "291" performs its magnificent detective work. It is good.

"291" countenances the artistic product as nothing short of a stunt, a feat, a trick cleverly concocted equally cleverly achieved by virtue of its own peculiar concoction of hypocrisy, cynicism and—Lies.

I have received from "291" more than I have given. To me it is a most encouraging sign, as it guards the distinctive element, giving to it its positive character, the kind that will stand the usual acid test; by being shown constructively, evolutionarily; whether it be in painting, sculpture, photography, music or medicine. To me "291" is what the perfect beautiful spring is to the wayfarer who drinks of its live living elements, which water refreshens, strengthens, enhances, and, exhilarates life. It receives and welcomes with the same innocence, confidence, trust, hope and purity, the same realism with which the child accepts as it sits and listens with an alertness all its own, as it receives its first "peep" into the mysteries and mysticism; the realities of song, of fairyland, rapt, and responsive. This same child for ages long, from primitive time, has been identified by the scientist, musician, painter, sculpturer, agriculturist, socialist, shoemaker, critic, policeman, anarchist, "Hobo" and detective—the child dubbed "291."

"Art," so called, "291" countenances as a vicious poison nurtured and nourished by the cynical little stream that trickles and trickles, rippling swiftly by, speeding and winding, rewinding, but more swiftly; when, when of a sudden it is "lost"—stealthily threatening the, immaculate spring with pollution. It is again at this juncture that the spirit of "291" fights hardest to stay the filth from first contact.—It is a veritable oasis on the great desert of far greater conception. "291" cannot die a natural death, it may "starve," but it cannot Starve no less than the higher criticism already alluded to—.

A great character He, who has made the little place possible, made it a Fact. This type of man is symbolical of the most perfect pilot, "with brow elate;" fighting ceaselessly, relentlessly with the ferociousness of the beast tasting hot blood; a stern Lover, a stern Hater—.
Ye Dealers, ye Critics all, listen: can you imagine yourselves at the head of such a “Business Enterprise” which is totally bereft of all “business routine,” without funds, minus pink tea festivals to tender to prospective “connoisseurs,” a place just a few feet square, a place where there are no “deals,” no “bargains,” no prizes, no prices? No surprises, etc., etc., but shock upon shock galore. Critic, Dealer, all of you: out with your garbage receptacles, “291” is interested to be sure, as of old; for every time it lifts the “lid” from off the garbage can to “see”; it gets into trouble, and everybody is then “introducing” themselves and we all know what is happening. It is good we are living in an age, when “lid” lifting is a specialty. “291” is a specialist—.

The penitent hour is arrived—. The age of “Confessions.” Better while an hour or so in communion with the giants, the paranoiacs. The wild ones, even the monkeys. Seek and ye will find the little “shrine” without even the aid of a sign-post, “guide” or even a “Bouncer” in military trappings. The spirit of “291” challenges all of you, so bring your “art” notions, critics all, and dealer remember “yours” also; I mean your “wares” of the various storages, out with “them” for life’s sake, for contrasts. I am sure it is over the precipice with you and “yours”—.

“Art” the corpse, the Lie; O! frail mangled frame, frame famed shadow box—chatterbox! Here you lie a wreck of blasted hopes prostrate as I stand o’er you and watch, indifferently wielding, the tiny instrument of torture, “I” standing face to face with Truth, with “truths”; with Love, with “loves;” with Proof, with “proofs;” with Life, with “lives”; for Art is Life! but “art” is Dead, dead, dead, hastened its own destruction; Life Is.

In perfect “exhaustion” I turn to sleep, to dream; to listen, silently and long, long, only, only to “dream”—?

A “new” sun rises, a greater sun rises, brings the greater document, the document of “documents.”—Photography dreams on, forgives all; weathers all; a stir! A Revelation, I press close—and find. It is the find of my life.

The Sun Is High—“291.”

E. Zoler

Dear Stieglitz:

In re-reading what I first wrote about the Secession I have felt that it did not really express the impression that “291” makes upon me and has made upon me from the beginning. Every time I think of it, it is not art, but humanity that comes most strongly up in my thoughts—humanity in a ferment—and therefore the following best expresses what I feel in regard to the little place where so many big events have transpired:

“291”—A human vortex.     J. N. Laurvik

43
A NURSERY CRIME DEDICATED
TO A TO Z FROM A TO Z

Believe me,
Twixt you and me,
Indeed He’s it,
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

Gee whiz!
Hot Air,
And atmosphere,
You get in there,
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

Once you go,
You go again,
To hear what’s what,
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

Some say, it’s rot,
And some say not,
But rot or not,
Or hot or not,
He knows what’s what,
Does A to Z,
From A to Z,
Of the little
Gallerie!

Space is small,
But oh, such vision,
That you get
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

Gee whiz!
Hot Air,
And atmosphere,
You get in there,
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

Some say, it’s rot,
And some say not,
But rot or not,
Or hot or not,
He knows what’s what,
Does A to Z,
From A to Z,
Of the little
Gallerie!

What is Life,
And what is not,
Is what you hear,
From A to Z,
In the little
Gallerie!

S. S. S.

44
The ability to offer much in little has always seemed the specific achievement of 291. There may be misgivings as to the orthodoxy of what is presented; there can be no gainsaying the manner in which the various aesthetic phenomena are placed upon view. No gallery the world over is so direct in appeal, or so diagnostic in method. 291 goes straight to the heart of things and, in consequence, its message has acquired a penetrative power which is frankly unparalleled. You cannot sympathetically examine the more exclusive manifestations of art under a vast expanse of glass and steel. Large exhibitions are extensive and impersonal, small ones intensive and individual, and it is the recognition of this fundamental truism that, more than anything, accounts for the effectiveness of 291.

Compact and concentrated, the periodic demonstrations to which we are accustomed at 291 possess that dynamic impetus without which art degenerates into a sterile and soulless formula. One thinks of 291 as an outpost, an experimental station, quite as much as a gallery, and nothing could be more stimulating than such a state of mind. An institution, though by no means institutional, 291 betrays no set programme, no suspicion of parti-pris. Casual fragments by the supreme protagonists of the modern movement, Cézanne and Rodin, the naïve pencillings of a mere anonymous child, or the austere abstraction of Pablo Picasso find equal consideration upon these modest wall surfaces. You may, indeed, glean as much by noting the emplacement of a bowl of flowers or a sprig of autumn leaves as from an exhibition itself. The essential fact about 291 is that every detail illustrates that most salutary of principles, the principle of aesthetic vitality. Art is here regarded as a living organism, as something fluid and fluxional, not fixed and final.

And yet, despite the spirit of ferment which is the keynote of these displays, there is nothing strident or aggressive about 291. A genial liftman from southern isles greets you in mellow monosyllables. The presiding aegis amid more rarefied regions above descants upon his aims and ambitions with a militancy more persuasive than pugnacious. A decade has drifted by since he first entered the lists, for this year, be it known, marks the decennial of 291. The cause which he espoused almost single-handed has become a characteristic feature of the progressive development of modern art, yet he and his setting have survived unchanged. Multum in parvo has remained his motto, and to this has been coupled an indifference to material considerations as rare as it is refreshing.

The chief reason why we spontaneously concur in proffering this symposium is because 291 has taught us not alone to seek for much in little. It has, above all, taught us to consider art not as a career, or a profession, but as a spiritual experience.

**Christian Brinton**
Dear Mr. Steiglitz:

In response to your kind invitation wish to say that I feel very strongly the value of the work that "291" has been doing in the field of Art. The basis on which it is done, namely, that of entire freedom from commercialism, is unique. There has been all along the spirit of the prophet; the vision to recognize and understand art expressions which are ahead of the time. The spirit of devotion to an ideal as there exemplified is most stimulating and helpful. May it long continue.

Sincerely yours,

N. E. Montross

My opportunities for keeping in touch with "291" have not been as great as I should desire; but in spite of this "291" has given me the privilege of seeing a wide variety of examples of the work of artists who are reaching out into new fields and who represent a distinctly modern impulse.

When one considers the vast amount of energy devoted to the exposition of the work of the artist by institutions, dealers, etc., of this country, it must strike him as a curious situation that only in one spot in America can he see the results of the most artistic activity.

Had "291" done no more than fill this unique position, I should feel greatly in its debt.

Hugh H. Breckenridge

My associations with "291" have not been extensive, but the memory of them is not the less rare. In this restless vortex which we call New York, in the whole commercial mechanism of official exhibition throughout the country, the little gallery stands unique in the purity of its ideals, in the simplicity of its methods.

To me it is an oasis. When I can escape from the battle and go there, it is like going home, in the finest sense. We don't have to pretend, we don't have to proclaim our importance, nor to struggle to maintain ground. We are understood and accepted for what we are, and, even better, for what we could be were all the world like this little place.

Helen W. Henderson
From the most interesting thoroughfare in the world carefully avoiding the chastity of a tea shop, and stumbling over bales and sweet scented crates from far Cathay; through a dingy, sunken hallway, then Ethiopianly piloted in the most incredible elevator to the attic. Another warren of a hallway and then the gallery.

Our cosmopolitan Mecca is cruel and hard. In the grind and flow there is scant refuge for the person who craves mental friction. Where can he find it? We lack the rendezvous of the café, "l’heure d’absinthe." Of course the foot may be raised to a brass rail, the hand placed upon an onyx other, and jostled, and crowded, one may hastily receive that across wet mahogany, and "toss off," what would mean excuse for conversation, in Paris, sitting calmly at a brass-bound marble table on the Boulevards. Where will one meet in New York strangers interesting enough to be engaged in conversation? The artist is a jackal, solitary he is a prowler, in a pack he howls, and here at "291" in a room no larger than a box-stall he may lift his voice. The cry is constant yet variant, now thin and strident, pale, anaemic, perverted, sexless: now vigorous, sonorous, distinctly male. Now again the cry is female, mate enticing, then changing to the cries of Sappho, and the whickerings of a Lesbian.

What has caused such a place to be? How can the critic, the percheron-minded professor, the hare-trigger artist, the vain musician, the lachrymose poet, the Gargantuan muck-raker, meet the poseur, the art student, the society matron, the sempiternal actress, the lecher, the baggage? How can the siren of the slums sing in this close harmony with upper Fifth Avenue? What makes the orthodox Jew tolerate the Jew apostate? Because there is one dominant note struck at "291": Truth! Organized truth, and it’s organizer is a Man.

As about the village blacksmith shop the socially inclined congregate, and seem to derive by induction some of the smith's power, this motley mass absorbs something from this Man. From this attic has emanated the essential knowledge of so-called "New Art" in this country. Through this small room have passed tremendous revelations. Amid the discussions of critics, and in spite of their disagreements, there has been a revelation of what the "Moderns" were doing. Through this room photography has taken its place with the Arts.

Here one can crucify himself if he is not careful. Sincerity can find an opening, but affectation never.

This gallery has drawn the fire of many critics, has afforded amusement to many persons, and has been a revelation to a few.

With incredible patience this Man has met this gamut of humanity. The question of the savant has been answered with the same courtesy as that of the cretin. The vigor of the man's mind is amazing. Flaying would have been a mild punishment for some of the concrete stupidity that this man has met with urbanity. A very liberal estimate of vital discussion.
would be approximately 20%, yet this man has patiently listened to the other 80% with courtesy. Such is real fortitude, and one cannot help wondering how many times this Man has conquered his temper.

The utter lack of commercial taint has been this gallery’s habit. And now as we see the commercial efforts of other galleries to harvest “Cubic Art,” the integrity of 291 is verified.

The scavengers that always follow the pioneer are at work, and they ply their vulture craft, offering their imitation wares with all the effrontery of trade. And the artists who are supplying their needs, got their ideas from “291”; but realizing that the usual commercial methods could not be supplied here they sought the “gilded portals” and in these “houses of art prostitution” they are now reaping the usual reward.

With the demolition of this little gallery, amid the debris of brick and mortar, lath and plaster, there will lurk the spirit of truth. Truth such as Zola loved, the truth of the true artist. Let us conjure fate to build again a new home for this truth, and build it upon the old foundations designed by this Man.

Ernest Haskell

I came into a small room. Not a soul was there. Empty walls. A few autumn leaves in a great brass bowl. I felt like sitting down. I sat on a box which was standing about. And I thought: this place needs no pictures. I staid there a long while—alone. No one disturbed me. Inspiration was in the atmosphere—and so was rest. And when I returned to the street it seemed more beautiful than before.

Frank Fleming

“291” is a man who lives through a company, a crowd busy expressing a man; a room and a shrine; an adventure and a dream; a pageant of critics, prophets and fools; a drama of creators; the lure of yesterday, the menace of tomorrow.

Lee Simonson
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

When you asked me, my dear Alfred, to write down some impressions of just what “291” has meant to me, I felt you were entering the enemy’s camp to request an opinion as to what was thought of the campaign just waged. I can write now much more dispassionately than I could have some five years ago, because then, frankly, the shows got on my nerves. Since that time, so many strange happenings have occurred in art, I am inclined to take them with complacency, if not toleration. It is a tearing down of the old faith, however, without substituting anything in its place, that one sees in “291.” To me, the years have brought no order out of the chaos of the new men you have exploited. When they or you talk—and I seem to have heard many theories within your walls—one is impressed by the logic, the sanity of intention, but when I see the results hanging about, I cannot perceive they have any relation whatsoever with the subject of the conversation. I have told you this many times and I can only reiterate it. When most of these men are not unspeakably dreary, they are pathetically weak in expression, or so strange and impossible as to say absolutely nothing to me, though I have—largely out of regard for you—striven hard to grasp their point of view.

Their utter disregard of form, or beauty as I understand it, their stupidity in the arrangement of composition lines are all things my art notions rebel at, recoil from in disgust. Now and then an exhibitor comes along at “291” who is less impossible than the rest, but I have yet to see one who has had the slightest appeal. It is all like a Barmecide Feast at which you tell me there are appetizing dishes, but which for the life of me, I can make nothing of and upon which I should starve. To me the value of the place has been perhaps that it has given some of the modern painters courage to work away from the conventional lines, to experiment, to dare, and as such I doubt not, it has had its place in the great economy of things. I am not sure however, but that it has done quite as much harm as good and I know after all, the men who have been most enthusiastic followers of your leaders have deteriorated into men who have blindly copied the Matisses, Picassos and the Picabias, and imitation while intensely flattering, is most unhealthy. I am too much a believer in the absolute necessity of knowledge of one’s craft to accept feeble, uncertain lines, poor construction and absence of modeling so obvious in the mass of things you have shown in your gallery. It all seems to my old-fashioned mind, an effort to arrive at some result without training, to attract attention not through artistic delight in nature, but through a novelty secured at any cost. No, Alfred, pleasant as it has been to drop in the rooms and listen occasionally to a discussion, I have yet to find inspiring things on the walls in the way of paintings, or in the sculptures on the shelves and I regret now more than ever, the distinct loss to photography that has been caused by your neglect of your camera through your attention to a field so different, for in photography you were supreme.

Arthur Hoeber
Two-Ninety-One and Rockefeller Institute are doing research work.
291—Art as a living thing in relation to life.
291—Where one can live and feel one’s own life.

A. Walkowitz

To me “291” stands for my delight and admiration for a personality; unselfish, keen, far-reaching, impartial, and dynamic enough to first show photographers what photography was with its limitations, and then to establish an oasis in the American Desert of art, freed from the fetters of favoritism, partiality and commercialism, where, without class distinction, an opportunity is afforded to study art in all the potentialities of its vagaries.

F. W. Hunter
Sincerity is the supreme commandment in art. Without obeying it no artist can work out his salvation, no people can have a national art. The opposite is true of trade as an art of gaining money. An individual, a nation, may perfectly well achieve both arts, but only so long as the condition peculiar to the one art is kept out of the other. There is no compromise between the two. And sincerity, in order that it may be expressed with originality, means spiritual liberty. I don’t know, if it is harder for most people to gain or to bear that state.

Thus Americans, after having won political freedom and given liberty to their slaves, pursue happiness of mind and culture by continuously enslaving themselves.

However, to me, and others, in Berlin, in 1892 it seemed, as if in America there would exist that all around liberty, that freedom, especially, from tradition, in short, such conditions, under which a new idea, in architecture, if not in art, could take form all the better; while the soil of the old world seemed too hard and sterile from tradition for so tender a plant as a still vague thought of a new style. Therefore—mistaken though I was in both respects—I set sail for America, in 1892.

Too late I read Martin Chuzzlewit—the professorial pioneer of Dickens’ imagination. Now, I know, that his satire is only too truthfully based upon that famous American insincerity: humbug. I know it, because it has been my lot here, in these twenty years and over, to have a thorough, most varied and pretty wide experience of life. The price I paid for success as an architect was a complete disillusionment, or rather, I won this price of being allowed to look at the skeleton in the American closet, through personal sacrifice called “success”—as you care to view it.

To make a very long story short, I will here only say that I look back without regret or blushing to the time, when I carried all my belongings in an empty vest pocket, my letters of introduction into an ash can, my ideals to a Hester Street pawnbroker and started at the bottom of the great American melting pot of men and things, viz.: the struggle for getting up. In no better way, and, while pushing through the thin and the thick of American life, the horizontal and vertical of American society, near and far, towards the so-called top—could I learn to comprehend, that in this land all things especially artistic ones, pale into utter insignificance before and are viewed principally through the great stomach-question, the mark of which is $—.

For, the American contemporary carries his brains beneath his stomach and his pocket-book, therefore he views all things, and art, from the point of the practical, the profitable. I could not have said this twenty years ago. But now, that I do say it, I know it to be so. A lawyer sees men as they are not, a physician as they would be, a pastor as they should be, but an architect sees them as they are. And I have seen, like Odysseus, “many men’s places and learned of their minds”—all over American society.

Especially, too, there where the “artistic” is supposed to be an accomplishment or a dressing of silver and gold-plate.
Of course, I myself succeeded from a free man whose time is worth nothing to where I could name to the millionaire my own price of my time and work—and thus I became my own slave-seller. Who in dollarland is more than a free slave and who can be less?

Success! There is our mistaken estimate of men, of art. It cannot be otherwise, being the answer to the stomach-question, and with the dollar mark. Americans adore that golden calf—success—and as a dog has fleas that animal's is pulex Americana, vulgo Humbug. This national bug hums in our ears eternally and deafens them against truth which clamors to be admitted in art. Humbug, the clown of our King Dollar, cousin to Hypocrisy.

Everybody, in order to succeed, first humbugs himself into a suitable and profitable state of insincerity, then, as he succeeds, he humbugs his neighbor. Escape? Protest? “What’s the use,” everybody replies, “to fight against the insincere side of our social and spiritual life, with its indifference, trifling superficiality, cowardly safe-and-sane-ness, dull unimaginative-ness—social qualifications that smile upon anything but personality. That which gives life to our trade, is death to our art: the principles of business enterprise.” Our virtues there are our faults here. In art we know not yet sincerity, and sacrifice, we have no common ideals, nor the will to suppress vanity and privilege. Our millionaire expects that his portrait painter does as well as his bootblack or barber.

So, by 1908, “success” commenced to lose its charms for me, its routine disgusted me. I found time to peruse all news and other information that came of the new and young art from Paris, of the astonishing architectural progress from Germany. Instead of continuing to waste time on our marketable art insipidities, I dusted off the ideals I once, many years ago, had left in the care of that Hester Street pawnbroker, where they lay—the stalest goods on his hands.

So it happened, while I used to mingle with the successful on Fifth Avenue, that a modest sign arrested my eye: “Photo-Secession.” I paid no further attention. Once more, and again. It vexed me. It stirred old reminiscences and fight in me. I was then preparing my speeches for the 1908 political campaign. The foreign name made me consider: “We export salvation and whisky to the heathens, but we restrict the immigration of new art, we quarantine a free thought as soon as we fear it might give us the creeps.” “Photo-Secession,” “Secession?” I said to myself, “it sounds familiar, as if from Vienna, Paris or Berlin; who in hell can it be! Probably some fool that does not yet know America. Well, I will out of curiosity, look him over, and maybe, I can take that useless conceit out of him.” With that idea I went up.

Before I had quite adjusted my mental antennae and feelers to the uncommercial humbleness of the place and to the enigmatic note of unpretentious but serious and novel works there living for themselves—I found myself in the midst of searching argument with some stranger, then with
another and also with one who kept himself behind spectacles but who had not his hat on and whom I took for the cashier of the "establishment," for want of stumbling in on the dealer—as customary, stepping upon the conscience of his free guests.

"There is some Monet in that, is it?" I ventured towards the eyeglasses which I regarded as the luxfer prisms over a dark back-store. "Money?" echoed back the prisms with that kindness that betrays amused contempt.

"Well, I have not seen this show advertised, so as to be prepared" I parried now.

"Advertised!" the smiling eye-glasses thrust forth.
"Are things for sale?" I lanced again.
"Why?" he sparred.
"Well damn it,"—I pushed forward—"it is art, I believe"—
"I don't know, what do you call art?" was his upper cut.
"Oh go on, I am here looking for your standard, not mine," I wrestled.
"But I haven't any," broke forth the spectacles.
"Do you mean it?" I gasped with slight suspicion of the usual game. And he: "Why certainly, I look for truth in art, and all I need for an acid test, is sincerity."

"Well then you are a missionary on blackest Fifth Avenue, a pioneer battling with the white Indians of obsolete New York," I gave way.
"I am nobody," he finished me.

As something is next to nothing, somebody is he who can conceive that he is next to nobody. On that day it dawned upon me that there was still hope.

Oscar Bluemner
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

The strident and persistent keynote that stands apart and above in the results of experience is awe. Light upon the earth; the touch of a beloved person; the seeing of colors; the contemplation of a philosophical concept; a battle: the few activities can suggest the mighty import of contact, of meeting—here we know something is happening! here the source of knowledge! this the Rubicon of all new movement in the world. To be alive is to be knowing this often. Incomprehensibility combined with reality, immediate and mysterious, are the dominant notes in art work worthy of the name.

In my memory of “291” these thoughts are always present.
We say we love those things which contain a good we would attain; and of all the world’s goods the spiritual tendency of humans is the single and often mislaid dictator of our civilization. Through the years from Plato to Kant; from before Christ down to Henri Bergson the race has discovered within herself undreamed of containments by means of the creative works of a small, widely separated, group of workers.
Excepting a few natural scientists, this time is distinctive for the absence of seers. Mistaking freedom for license and accepting economic utilization for spiritual expression the absence of great leaders and a higher generality of humans has developed no ideals capable of approaching, much less allaying, the unrest, the distress, and even the flippancy of most people today.

Hence, when I found “291” exhibiting the work and disseminating the ideas of a few men who consciously or unconsciously were expressing the chaos, or particular realities in its midst, of our own changing years—whoever led by the pure urge to express to transcribe their love, hatred or awe of the world—it was instinctly obvious that here was being displayed for all to see a good I intensely desired to attain. Here were men who realized the human relation to the life of a flower; who saw that daylight was an entity upon the earth, and that the sight of the open heavens pulsated the human organism to endeavors far beyond the scope of their usual activities. They were sensitive to the world and saw reflected in all it contained relations to their desires. Here were artists feeling realities; and knowing the artifice, for them, of many long accepted viewpoints.

As the race found itself repeatedly in the creations of genius so these men discovered for me the awe and inspired the endeavor I contain when I see the sun. Combined, they crystallize the attitude, and their work the expression of “291”—a living, tremulous entity, which, without words, has helped me to live.

C. Duncan
—“THERE IS ALWAYS A ‘MORE’—
A GREATER VISION—A GREATER REALIZATION”—

Singing, I greet you!
My spirit to yours—
I hear you—will you hear me?
There is a great wind on the world—
Today and tomorrow I greet you—the same—

Singing,

Over against your justification of the past,
Against the vision you have made prescient and real;
The mad results of blindness hurl upon us.
Chaos moving out of civilization
Into an unmitigable crisis—
War!

One must be a god to become a man, today!

Like an impossible pageant it all seems.
One comes—one goes—the leaves fall.
A procession of days, with their furious pain and their sardonic laughter,—
All—a pageant of great sound—and of greater stillness—
This, my city—that, my world—
And within this one heroic, terrible year
The events of a life-time.

Like a dream or a dreadful terror
These things pass—
And I become deeply conscious of all which is near to me,
All which means relationship to my inner life—
All which lasts livingly—amidst this going mad of human strength,
While in the distance I comprehend a battle raging between races,
Its fiercity enveloping the globe
As men die—one upon another.

Free from the limits of this devastation
With its indestructible purity of spirit explaining even today;
A vision stands.
Conceived by one man’s sufferings and understandings
Evolved into the many.
One scarcely knows—
I think there can be no beginning to a great vision
There are so many human lives interwoven.
Justified by life and by the inner need
It comes.
Day after day of supreme effort builted it,
And upon day and night a sense of sound
Whirling—as of a million elements up-gathering
Centuries away—into a present truth.
A Spirit—held by human workers—holding them—
Driving, beyond man’s death, a force unto greater life
   Endlessly creating.

Worlds shape in some such way
Laughter upon laughter
And pain—
Amid the loneliness and fierceness of the yearn of man.

I touch four walls—I hear voices—and I feel the
   nearness of creative forces throbbing.
Colors and forms and lines
   Living men these are
   Men with their lives facing the world
   To be laughed at—or loathed—
   Daring to be themselves.
It has pervaded a city and many cities
Until the unknown necessity for it has become a divine right.
And the greatness of Today confronts us—in spite of all petty things.
Those who have touched its world-scope
   Tremble at its divinity.—

A great force lives!
If the walls are felled—does it matter?
   Valuer!—Visioner!
Only the space of the vision shall grow more deeply into the spirit alone.

A feeling of mountain tops
Blue flame-like distances
New stars for men to see
New suns to burn upon their souls
   New faith.
And touching all who sense its touch
The desire to feel—more beautifully,
And to transmit one’s self—more perfectly.
A consciousness that one need not seek behind the clouds
For a compellingness to perish greatly,
In order that the Image with tomorrow’s dawn may breathe.

I too went gazing, questioning, answering,
I too merged with the voices; and the walls echoed—your truth’s Nature;
   Work it was—Work, work,—
   To be unafraid of life—infinitely unafraid—
I too felt the need to give—I too—
Singing I call to you!
You! deep-moving sea-tides—wonder-wind of day and dark;
   Flood me with your clarities.
Sun and moon be luminous—
Hills, echo your power—
Nature, I love you—I call to you—
Through my closeness to you and my love
I have watched you many hours-long;
I have tested your strength and your sanity;
I know you to be glorious.
   Bring me yourself
   For I must give.
I demand of you—Men and Women
Can you not sense a relationship to it all?
A song—a song is singing!
It has sung itself for years—
It has always been singing;
But it takes love to hear and understand it.
Love, and the giving of all into a belief that with tomorrow shall be born a
greater race.
Can you content yourselves with the sham
When the world of life is here?
Stretch out your arms and encompass emotion,
Give of your very body which lasts like a breath of eternity—
Give it all! with all your force—
Knowing all pain, all possible sorrow,—
Push on, into the depths of feeling and absorbing,
Hold nothing back that is vital and precious to you,
   On—On—
   Until you have one immortal thing to give
Until your soul has bared itself—has divested itself of passion and thought,
Until you may see a little further,
Hear a song that shall be your song,
   You singing!
Touch that which shall be nearest you—life,
   Your life—and you, living!
There is a fire burning,
There is a wind beyond,
And the sky is cold and gray,
Yet a mountain stands—resisting—expanding—
And tomorrow shall be sky-space
   Crystal-clear.
Singing, I greet you—greet you greatly—
   With this song.

Katharine N. Rhoades
A TOAST

I bring you our beloved 291 where beauty furthers all in us that is good, where wisdom understands and forgives all that is weak or evil, where intellectual combats may be many but where the spirit in its eternal struggle finds a perfect respite.

AGNES ERNST MEYER

291?

The "2" equals the pro and the con—the eternal balance—the right and the wrong—the beautiful and the ugly—the yes and the no.

The "9" is a mystic number—the spirit at work—the yeast in the resisting dough—the opener of doors—the spark that propels thought—the unexpected mutation.

The "1" is the magnet that attracts the presence of antipathetic forces—the continued monistic note—the undiverging line.

MARION H. BECKETT
A LETTER

While in Cuba this early summer the value of "291" came vividly before me, and I intended writing to tell you of it.

I imagine my experience of seeing evil is similar to that of many people. One as a child loves the sun, loves the good that touches him,—one has an easy belief in the value of living—one feels this to be held in common with all humans—then gradually as ideals of good begin to crystallize and take definite shape the number of people holding these ideals seem to be few—still one thinks there is room in the world—that they, no doubt, hold ideals as good as one's own—for them!

Then a lightning stroke of experience may come cutting in a flash, straight thro all humanity and one realizes the evil in all men—the willful throttling of life—the imperfection of the whole race. One may feel for a moment, that nowhere is good as strong as evil, that everywhere the desire to live is counter-balanced and finally overcome by the weight of weakness—perhaps even that ideals are untruth.

One is shocked to the roots by the discovery. Man is a rotten seed unfit for aught but cracked sound—would it not be vastly better for him to die out that life may express itself thro fitter forms?

Gradually one becomes conscious of the definite realization in one's self of a good and bad of the inextinguishable need to health of mind and body, of the consideration of and striving for good—and then finally the consciousness that one is but a human being like millions of others, proving this need to be common. Now—here suddenly comes the hot appreciation of those few beings who realize and give their lives to the all-importance of considering the good. When oppressed with stupendous need of coming closer to livingness in order to live, the immense value is vivid of a little room where the quality of life one seeks in the upstretching of green things, the singing of birds, shows itself thro human beings. That even one being believes this life quality can be increased in people, and believes it so strongly that he spends his life in trying to increase it, is heartening—it also illustrates in that one man the strength of desire for good.

So whether one believes in his theory or not, when one is sick with too much viewing of man's failure to seek life—the remembrance of a little place where the one aim and emphasis is toward life is health giving.

The pleasure to me of "291" has been the sights I've seen there—the value to me has been in enabling me to touch close in spirit the spirit of others thro their expression. The bringing together of these expressions—the choice—the recognizing their value is what you have given me. You have brought to me what it would have been difficult, and for years perhaps, impossible, for me to have gotten otherwise. All this I've appreciated for long. But now the value of you as a human being doing and standing for things that may not affect me personally, is the matter of importance—and this is the thing I overflow with. I have not taste for many things you do—I think the continual republishing of criticisms which illustrate the
stupidity, change, development of critics gives wrong proportion to criticism and material criticised. Whereas the criticisms preserved and used finally to prove historically an argument would seem better and in the meantime feed the hungry more amply. But I realize that you have an idea in doing this—that it is all part of your technic and the fact that you do it and in accordance with your ideals is the thing for which I am so thankful.

See what wide limits you reach!—you give so broadly to those who would struggle along any way, somehow, wresting life from the wide world, you give deep drafts, and to those whose backs are turned not content to simply offer, you take them strongly by the shoulders and stick their noses in the water of life till they find it good. This last, foreign as it is to my “make up,” I admire most in you. The strength and insistence of your belief, the unwearying, undiscouraged attempts of the real artist—the real man. Ranking with the greatest of these who express their Life impulse directly through the life of men. Wonderful is this to think on!—doing it simply because you cannot do otherwise—ah, that makes one sure of the reality of life.

CLIFFORD WILLIAMS

DEAR STIEGLITZ:

The following is an incident which seems to me reflects the logical development of “291,” and being the result of various combined energies of the New Art expression and the higher realization of this new creative force around you that you were the first in America to understand and feel the necessity.

This was in Paris around 1909 on a night we offered ourselves the modest treat of a café to celebrate the departure of a young Post-Impressionist (Max Weber) for New York. (Le Père Rousseau was also with us.) The conversation naturally turned to the subject as to what sort of a reception was reserved for the New Art movement in America. The prospects looked hopeless to a degree that even just getting a hearing in the land of commerce seemed remote, and in the stress of such discouraging outlook and despairing conclusions we looked for consolation in our ideals as we drifted away in the speculations as to what sort of a free centre might be created for the younger generation (us) for the manifestation of the New Art, and when I look back at the various ideals expressed upon the subject and condense them all in one, “291” is the realization of all we longed for. On my return to New York I felt an immediate attachment and love for the Little Galleries as something of my higher self there already realized.

In the same way as time goes on there are other young artists creating and seeking expression, and it is this vital force you grasp so well that makes “291” what it is today: the advance guard of living ideas.

Vals-les-Bains, France, November, 1914.

SAMUEL HALPERT
IMPRESSIONS OF 291

The gray walls of the little gallery are always pregnant.

A new development greets me at each visit, I am never disappointed. Sometimes I am pleased, sometimes surprised, sometimes hurt. But I always possess the situation. A personality lives through it all. Each time a different element of it expressed by the same means appears. There is a unity in these succeeding and recurring elements.

Cézanne the naturalist; Picasso the mystic realist; Matisse of large charms and Chinese refinement; Brancusi the divine machinist; Rodin the illusionist—Picabia surveyor of emotions—Hartley the revolutionist—Walkowitz the multiplier; Marin the lyricist; De Zayas insinuating; Burty the intimate; the children, elemental.

A Man, the lover of all through himself stands in his little gray room. His eyes have no sparks—they burn within. The words he utters come from everywhere and their meaning lies in the future. The Man is inevitable. Everyone moves him and no one moves him. The Man through all expresses himself.

MAN RAY

291

It seems like an impossibility to write on "291." It is an impossibility. For how can mere words impart to another its real spirit? It is so big, so pure, so living, that the more one says, the more apt one is to take away from its bigness. And to give another even a faint idea of the universal influence of "291" would fill books—and when the books were filled, what would they mean? for "291" is too living to be confined to words.

For me it has been a sublime school. It permits you to grow naturally, never fixing laws, but helping you to see clearly and choose for yourself.

It fosters everything that is beautiful, and destroys all that is ugly.

All who enter into its little abode are sure to feel the great force that is living and growing there.

MARIE J. RAPP
WHAT 291 MEANS TO ME

To me “291” represents an Idea. The Idea has been physically embodied in the Little Gallery and its exhibitions. It has been spiritually incorporated into the consciousness of those who have been privileged to share it.

In my own case, the background of the Idea is a deep affection for the man who has inspired it. For, in the first and final analysis, “291” is an expression of the soul of Alfred Stieglitz. It was his intuition that visioned the Idea and his patient logic that has shaped the circumstances which have ensured its continuity of growth.

And the Idea has grown because the Idea itself was growth, the principle of movement as the instinctive need of life. In the early days, for the sake of a name, we called our adventure in Idealism “Photo-Secession.” It represented movement away from something, not positively stated; for it was of the essence of the Idea that it should in no wise become formulated and be thereby doomed to sterility. It was a strategic retirement, preparatory to advancing, and again toward no definite objective. For the soul of the Idea has been the liberty of spiritual growth.

“291” has been a little home of liberty. No introduction was needed and no formalities expected. One was free to say nothing or to speak out. Only the word said or the thing done must bear the impress of sincerity; the mark of the man or woman’s own self, pure of selfish motive and unbiased by fear or favor. And through this contact with other free spirits, whether the latter were present in person or represented in their works, one’s own freedom grew in liberality. In learning to understand others’ need of liberty, one could enlarge one’s own.

In other words, the Idea of “291” has involved the broadening and deepening of spiritual sympathy. We have learned to feel life through the needs and aspirations of others. This did not imply unqualified agreement or even escape from oppositions, but it has helped to lower the barriers that necessarily part one human soul from others and to widen the horizon of spiritual understanding.

And in promoting sympathy it has helped us to share in the privilege and beauty of personal service. It has led to a fuller and more discerning interest in human values and developed a closer spiritual comradeship.

Accordingly, my love of “291” is enriched with gratitude. It has helped me through a period of life in which there is more than a little tendency to become mentally and spiritually fossilized. It has helped me to grow in humanness and to preserve something of the freshness of an ideal.

As a local habitation “291” will pass away, and the memory of its name will endure only for a time. But its Idea will continue as part of the imperishable spirituality of life.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN
That the Photo-Secession kept on seceding is surely what proves that it was worth while. To me the main things that can be said may be summarized in this keynote—that many have been much more alive on account of "291."

It has been a clearing house of ideas, compared to which the average school or academy is a morgue. It has been no institution devoted to hollow classic echoes and to rituals of the conventionalities.

No! "291" has been concerned, as were the classic Greeks themselves, not with dogma and convention, but with growth and development.

It has been as the lyceum—or as a school of philosophers in a quiet corner of the agora, if you prefer—presided over by an intellectual protagonist, one who, in discussion, is a master of Socratic dialectic, one by aid of whose mental and aesthetic midwifery many inquiring minds have brought forth ideas that were new unto themselves, and have discovered that these newborn ideas, although they had seemed novel and strange at first utterance, were nevertheless truly their own thenceforward, and vital to them, and good.

And when some imposing mountain, as it were gravid, in parturition groaned, and brought forth but a mouse, at least the frequenters of the clinic were amused and, mayhap, enlightened.

So, to go to "291" might be to wonder, to puzzle, and to the self-saturated little human atom that might be all. But to those ready to think, and question themselves as well as what they saw—and heard—to those ready to exchange ideas—or to change them—it meant, in fact, to live some more, to get many a spiritual lift.

Much for which "291" will never get any credit, has originated or been energized from its ramifying aerials. It has been a "live wire" of radiations reaching farther and wider than ever can or will be acknowledged. It must go on record as an unusual localization of a modern mind-phase, underlying the superficial material, and as a glimpse of something real; just as now, underlying what has been called dead matter, are conjectured the vortex rings or imperishable energy "beyond the atom."

DAPPLET FUGUET
What does “291” mean to me?—The thrills received from Matisse, from Picasso, from Brancusi? The Rabelaisian delights of Walkowitz, the glorious topsy-turvydom of Marin or the glowing sincerity of Steichen? In vain do I try to convince myself that all this is “291”—quite in vain—“291” is Stieglitz.

I can see you rage as you read this, dear Stieglitz. I can see that wonderful hirsute adornment of yours rise as if under the machiavellian hand of De Zayas—but you are quite helpless, you cannot apply the blue pencil—the Censor has never yet been admitted to “291.”

Yes, Stieglitz, in spite of your “art stuff” you are It. In spite of your endless drool you are the magnet of Life.

I wish that I were able to repay you for the countless times you have so lavishly poured courage into my soul, enthusiasm into my living, and clarity into my thinking;—for the countless times I have come to you a hopeless incoherent mass, my courage like so much wet tissue paper, my mind fringed by the seeming uselessness of things, and left you an optimistic, determined and directed Endeavor.

I owe you much, Stieglitz, perhaps more than do your Satellites, for they, at least have seen the Light—they know that Rembrandt, Leonardo, Raphael, Velasquez and the other old fogies are weak, flabby and hopelessly defunct; they know that the Metropolitan Museum is but a morgue and as such should be relegated to its proper place under ground—but I, oh Stieglitz, am still groping in darkness—my eyes are still unopened—and when you are not looking, I creep back to that same Morgue, and find there, as I have at “291”, the glory you radiate.

Stieglitz—I salute you.

Belle Greene
It is probably natural that many people should have wanted to know what it was, but it is amazing that some sixty individuals should have been ready and able to give some kind of an answer as to what it means to them. —"291?"—I have never known just what it was, I don't know now, and I do not believe anyone else does. "291" only seems to us what we as individuals want it to be, and because I have my particular "want it to be" stronger today than ever before, do I resent this inquiry into its meaning as being impertinent, egoistic and previous. Previous in so far that it makes the process resemble an obituary or an inquest, and because it further tends to establish a precedent in the form of a past.

The spirit of "291" can never manifest itself through any definitely expressive label, or scheme of organization, it can never have anything resembling a constitution or an eternal policy, for the very good reason that any one of these would be sufficient to dull its receptivity to new elements, especially to the one element which has ever arrived opportunely and kept "291" a living issue:—the great unforeseen. Assuming there is always present the fundamentally necessary intelligent independence, "291" must be kept as free to discard absolutely as it must be free to be enthusiastically receptive; and on this premise its men, its ideas and its ideals can always be severely and intensively yet fairly tested. Therefore, there is no permanent room for dogma or even the trace of anything that moves toward dogma.

In the beginning of August, 1914, dogma demonstrated its failure again and as far as "291" was concerned I was then ready to put an art movement such as futurism with anarchy and socialism into the same bag as Church and State to be labeled "Dogma" and relegated to the scrap heap—History.

The essential progress of "291" has not so much been due to a gradual process of evolution as to sudden and brusque changes caused largely by an eager receptivity to the unforeseen. Each of these mutative movements found reactionary spirits in "291" and in transforming these or in eliminating them Stieglitz has ever shown his greatest "291" potentiality. My appreciating and presenting this particular quality as the most important one and the one which virtually makes of him a despot, does not mean that I do not recognize the importance of the broad generous understanding and support that Stieglitz has given to the individuals, as individuals, that form the aggregate "291." It is in this respect that to many of us he has been of greater importance in our personal development than it would ordinarily seem any single unrelated individual could possibly be.

During the past year, possibly two years, "291" has seemed to me to be merely marking time. It had obviously reached a result in one of its particular efforts and had accomplished a definite result within itself and for itself: —and for the public at large it had laid the way for others to successfully organize the big International Exhibition of Modern Art held at the Armory in 1913.
Whether it was the discouragement that follows achievement, or a desire to cling to success and permanently establish its value, or merely a consequent inertia caused by the absence of new or vital creative forces I am not prepared to discuss here—but “291” was not actively a living issue. I also fail to see any reason other than one or all of those enumerated above that explains to me the attitude leading to the publishing of this Number of Camera Work, unless it is simply the result of 291’s finding itself with nothing better to do.

Again arrives the unforeseen—came the War.

If ever there came, within our time, a psychological element of universal consequence that could rouse individuals out of themselves as individuals and grip humanity at its very entrails, surely it was this one.

“291” continued the process of producing a book about itself,—and calmly continued its state of marking time. As “291” it had failed for once, and on this, an occasion of the greatest necessity, to realize its relationship to the great unforeseen. It failed, as every human institution failed, demoralized by the immensity of the event and blinded by the immediate discussion of it, instead of instantly grasping the significance of the great responsibility that was suddenly ours. It failed to grasp the necessity of making of itself a vast force instead of a local one. Furthermore by this failure is still left many individuals outside of its immediate circle riding about with the solemn conviction that “291” was merely a “rival to the old Camera Club” or “Mr. Stieglitz’s Gallery for the newest in art.”

By doing the convincing things conviction is carried and results achieved that can never be accomplished by simply explaining them.

In this our endeavor to find wherein lies our best effort and to register its appreciation let us be intelligent enough, then strong enough to recognize our failure and write them both upon the same page.  

Eduard J. Steichen
One of our daily advertising sheets recently offered a reward of $1000.00 for the discovery and apprehension of the Anarchistic bombthrowers who have been terrorizing the community. Is it possible that the reportorial staff of the Pulitzers and the Anarchist squad of the police department has not yet discovered the meeting place of these dastardly miscreants?

Dear taxpayers, you are cheated by incompetent servants. I will reveal to you the secret of these blackhanders. The conspirators meet daily under your very nose, at 291 Fifth Avenue! Their chief is a voluble individual, to all appearances a foreigner, who perpetrates his nefarious work under the nom de plume of Alfred Stieglitz.

There, the secret is out. If you think this is all a joke you are mighty mistaken. Among the bombthrowers I am acquainted with Alfred Stieglitz stands without doubt in the foremost rank. He is a most dangerous agitator, a great disturber of the peace; more than any other man he has helped to undermine old institutions; he has helped to kill venerable beliefs, and to destroy sacred traditions. An iconoclast in the realm of art, he has succeeded in shocking cruelly the moral guardians of classicism. At 291 he has created a social center unique in character, a battlefield for new ideas, where every sinner's confession is accepted at its own value.

I do not know what the seven great wonders of modern times are, but I am sure that 291 Fifth Avenue is one of the seven great wonders of the island of Manhattan. Yet I confess, I dread the idea of entering the lift to the sanctum of Stieglitz. Every time I notice an announcement of a new exhibition at the Photo-Secession I am in great anticipation. Hastily I speed toward Fifth Avenue. But when I reach the historic building I begin to shiver, I feel uncomfortable, I turn and rush back to my garret; I am afraid of the flood of words Stieglitz will let loose upon my poor nerves.

Now I have seen Stieglitz in concert halls and at public lectures; he is a good listener and a shrewd observer. I met him at a private gathering and he proved to be a brilliant conversationalist. Why, why then, does he attack his visitors like a hurricane, leaving the poor mortals not the least chance to say a word, much less express an opinion?

It is his strength; he has a mission; he is obsessed with and possessed by ideas. He tells the truth; he is impelled to preach the Gospel; he tries to disturb mental lethargy, he endeavors to widen the artistic horizon of his auditors.

Many understood and appreciated the new attempts in artistic expression, but Stieglitz first had the courage to bring the work of the striving coiners of the new art before the public. For this he deserves great credit and our thanks.

This new art has anarchic tendencies: such is the complaint of old mummies. In this we rejoice. Classicism is always conservativism. A searcher for new expression is naturally a rebel, and where do you find a rebel without anarchistic tendencies?
Has Stieglitz accomplished much? I think he cannot help but feel satisfied with his achievement. True, some tell me that he gave us riddles to solve, mathematical problems and lessons in algebra.

Granted: but he has made many think; what more can you expect?

A man whom I love and admire believes Stieglitz is the greatest scoundrel in the universe. I wish somebody would pay me such a compliment.

HIPPOLYTE HAVEL

291

Except that the inlet and the outlet to the same are perfectly free to the public, the little gallery of the Photo-Secession bears an astonishing outward resemblance to a meeting place for avowed "enemy's of society."

Duplicated as a stage setting for the Grand Guignol, we should know the moment the curtain rolled up that strange and possibly noble mysteries were to be enacted before our eyes; we should know that spies and officers of the law were waiting outside ready to pounce in and make trouble; and a great wave of sympathy would surge through our bosoms when the hero (Mr. Stieglitz) trod the boards,—for in the theatre, at least, we still respond to heroism.

* * * * * * *

But Mr. Stieglitz isn't a nihilist. At least I don't think so. He looks you straight in the eye! However, they say that many quite honest people can't do that. He has the hair, of course. But in the Dostoievsky novels and the Russian plays at the Grand Guignol with the dreadful endings, the heroes are charming to their friends and absolutely regular in their marital relations, but at the end they rush out and blow up the Tzar's two sisters-in-law, or do something else equally unacademic.

You simply never can guess the ending of these altruists. The little gallery is hung in gray usually. Quakerish or gunboatish, as you like,. . . John Marin always impresses me as one who is here "upon a secret errand," like the people in the Walter Pater sketches. . . . What do they do in that back room, do you suppose? . . . Still, I have never seen any bits of wire nor jugs of glycerine. . . .

* * * * * * *

At night great guards patrol the corridors. The walls are amazingly sturdy. Bombs might crumble them a trifle, but not seriously. Outside the police are plentiful and ever watching. What chance have they? Besides, they wouldn't dare. Why should we worry? They couldn't blow up the Altman Rembrandts—the Rodin drawings are underneath!

HARRY McBRIDE
es un “alto allí”—para los que quieren saber como se piensa, como se desarrolla el pensamiento vertiginoso de los que pueden pensar hondo.

es también un “venite at meas” para todos los niños—los ingenuos del arte—que buscan lo que busca toda alma: en donde estará la verdad?—
es un grito de “alerta” para el burgues que no teme á los que avanzan, y un grito de “adelante” para los que tienen los pies sobre la tierra que es dura y las frentes en las nubes que consuelan.
es un misterio—por eso el arte, que es el ídolo incomprensido, puede estar allí guardado y expuesto.

dejó de ser la cifra inflexible que señala una casa; el número de un expósito, ó de la cama de un hospital.

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291 dejó de ser la cifra inflexible que señala una casa; el número de un expósito, ó de la cama de un hospital.

291 está rehabilitado de ser cifra, porque en el mundo del arte—único mundo conocido hasta ahora—ya no es cifra sino símbolo.

TORRES PALOMAR
The sun-disc-emblem which “291” has maintained, these ten years, in its entrance-hall, between Mary-Elizabeth’s carnal, and Long Sang Ti’s spiritual allurements, has assumed with time a steely countenance, with features vacuous and waiting; a fitting symbol for a mirror-like place.

A cosmos-reflecting dew-drop, returning to each one of us his illumined spectre—is “291” to me. Diverse images of life are here focused side by side. In it, ideal finds the blue flower, and vanity—its tinsel. In it, truth sees its innocence, and falsehood—its aesthetic fig-leaf. Here didacity shouts sapience into wisdom’s patient ear. A cheap maecenas here beholds an ample needle’s eye for the camel. Nearby a man stops one of destiny’s leaks with his own heart. In this charmed lens a cat sees herself a social lioness, and sharpens her obtuse claws with harmless radicalism, and thanks God for one more excuse for snobbery. A soaring eagle finds comet-wings here, where moles deftly administer an eternal twilight-sleep to a New Era in travail. Here art is dying at the breasts of New-art academicians, and is reborn to greater glory in creators’ free souls. Here fate disports and scatters its staples with a lavish hand. . . . Holding a mirror up to life—that is Stieglitz’s art.

JOHN WEICHESEL
It is given to no man to fasten a single definition upon "291."

If St. Paul should visit Gotham; and if having walked through Wall Street and visited the Shopping District, he should pause on the crest of Murray Hill to be interviewed by the Press; he would doubtless point down the Avenue to "291" and say "Ye men of New York, as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."

And again, if a Gothic gargoyle-maker, awakened from his long sleep, should turn his chisel to the fashioning of its symbol, he would doubtless carve, for "291," a dwarf Colossus standing militantly astraddle the line which divides the Sublime from the Ridiculous.

And again, if the mixed lingo of modern orthodoxy be drawn upon for a description, it must read, "A microcosmic evolution, in which the survival of the fittest is personally presided over by an omniscient deity—made in man's image."

But "291" is greater than the sum of all its definitions. For it is a living force, working both good and evil.

It is an active and obscene offense in the eyes of the ossified.
It proffers free lotus juice to the flaccid.
Its tentativeness is toxic to the ill-trued.
Its functioning is supremely tonic to the tonable.

To me, "291" has meant an intellectual antidote to the nineteenth century; a spiritual preparation for—the twenty first; and, withal, a glorious training camp and practice ground for eclecticism.

J. B. Kerfoot
WHAT DOEST THOU, 291?

There do I sow says 291; my heart is a spring of fastidious disposition; 291 overworks itself; a poet has written the book and has clad it in human form.

291 arranges the locks on its forehead—but the flames cannot scorch it; its soul is filled with a life that fills each hour with sunshine; its eyes, its ears announce an intelligence; that is why it has been taught neither craft nor art, but it will find its place in the sublime sequence.

Two souls and the sky in this clamorous city; they manage to unite in the midst of the commercial uproar; a mystical communion. For my part, I believe the window opens to the perspective close to the proximate intermingling of the sea—indifference to concrete matter—truth without polemics. We must see in him a proclamation devoid of affirmation, morning dew; ’tis the only place in the Universe which will refuse to see the value of his teaching. The conservative “Vive la France.” “Vive la Guerre;” time to smoke a cigarette. I answered that I refused to discuss. 291 is a big step forward which begins and which ends from inexhaustible abundance, leaning on its elbows at the window of the catechumens. Clear sighted and scrupulous, a sensational event, generous towards his patrons who elbow one another hurriedly in these small quarters. Let us get a good understanding of the spirit of 291; here is a new way to conceive life; he enjoys his work; I am glad to see thee. His prestige will ascend rapidly the steps of the throne and telegraphic and telephonic communications have been interrupted in many places—that is why he is a musician and his music is an inexhaustible spring—the conservative “if thou bringest to me I will give to thee.” He knows him not; he is good; he is a God; I love him.

St. Cloud, July 17, 1914.
I belong, or at least I believe I belong, to that class that Carlyle describes as "cause-and-effect speculators", a class for whom no wonder remains wonderful, but all things in Heaven and Earth must be computed and "accounted for". This mental attitude is, indeed, not at all romantic, but to my belief just as good or just as bad as any other. At any rate, that is the criterion according to which I form my opinions, though I must confess that I am, like a certain writer, not always of my own opinions.

Liberty, Freedom, Individualism, Self-expression, To-live-one's-own-life-in-one's-own-way, &c., &c., are, in my opinion, nothing else but the tools with which the strong draw out of the timid things that the latter would not do except under the influence of the toxic of those ideas. I owe to 291 all that I have given to 291.

Not an Idea nor an Ideal, but something more potent, a Fact, something accomplished, being of a nature although perfect, by no means final or conclusive, but much to the contrary.

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MARIUS DE ZAYAS
I know a place
where reason halts
in season and out of season
where something takes the place
in place of reason
a spirit there hovers roundabout
a something felt by those who feel it
here together and to those who come
a place of comfort
a place electric a place alive
a place magnetic
since it started it existed
for those sincere: those thirsty ones
to live their lives
to do their do
who feel they have
yet cannot show.
The place is guarded,
well guarded it
by He—who jealously guards
its innocence, purity, sincerity
subtly guarded it
so that—it seems—not guarded at all
no tyrant he—yet tyrant of tyranny
so shout—we who have felt it
we who are of it
its past—its future
this place
what place?
Oh Hell 291

JOHN MARIN
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“Yes, one has many curious experiences. Once I fell into the sea—as usual, camera and all—when out on the thin ice, and had a nasty, cold time, regaining the hut in frozen stiff clothes. It did not hurt the camera—it was a ‘Graflex.’”

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