



Questions

1. What's going on in this painting?
2. What could be some reasons for titling this "Suburban Life"?
3. What could be a reason for the expression on the face of the woman dressed in black?
4. In 1936 Cadmus was commissioned by TRAP (later WPA) to design 4 murals for the post office (or library) in affluent Port Washington (some considered the model for Fitzgerald's town in *The Great Gatsby*). His paintings, however, were rejected as inappropriate. Considering the hardships and sacrifices of the Depression, why might this have been objectionable?

Main Points

1. The 2 girls, along with their friend, dominate the canvas and the street scene. Two carry tennis racquets. The girl closest to us resists the pull of her dachshund on a long red leash. They draw the leers or stares of disapproval from many on the street except, perhaps, the policeman who seems to halt traffic just for them to cross.
2. Small town buildings such as the Woolworth's, the drugstore, the one with a false-front, the theater, the church spire, all proclaim Main Street, USA. Cars, not streetcars, are the preferred means of transportation as small towns become commuter communities.
3. The tennis trio seems careless and self-satisfied; their goal is to enjoy the country club life in the depths of the Depression. The commuter community is displacing/shoving aside the town's longstanding residents.
4. The lounging "local yokels" watching the passing scene, the auto repair in progress, the contrast between the idle, complacent nouveau riche and the rest of the town, the chaotic scene -- all cast a less than ideal view of the town. [Definitely not Norman Rockwell's feel good "portraits" of idyllic small

town life.] “The salaciousness of Cadmus’s subjects -- incongruously rendered in a style inspired by Renaissance painting--did not sit well with the civic leaders of Port Washington, and the painting was shipped back to the artist shortly after it was received.” Elizabeth Armstrong, *Villa America*, p. 26.

Background Information

1. Born in 1904 to artists, a lithographer father and book illustrator mother.
2. Left high school at 15 and studied art at the National Academy of Design, with blessing of his parents’ (both alums). He studied under Charles Hinton, educated in the Gerome atelier in Paris. Later studied at the Art Students League of New York City.
3. Influenced by Italian Renaissance artists’ attention to drawing the human figure. (See last page)
4. Freelanced, selling illustrations to newspapers, before landing a job at an advertising agency.
5. Went to Europe in 1931 with his lover Jared French, whom he met in the League classes. Traveling by bicycle, they toured France, studied Italian Renaissance style in Italian museums, and painted in Mallorca.
6. Returned home in 1932 and accepted a job with the precursor to WPA (Treasury Relief Art Project) for \$32 a week. He painted *Fleet’s In!* and promptly raised the ire of Admiral Rodman, who had the painting removed from the Corcoran exhibit because it portrayed sailors as drunk and rowdy. (Some believe the real objection, though never stated, was the portrayal of the civilian in red tie offering a cigarette to the sailor, which brought up the tabu subject of homosexuality.)
7. “Cadmus also submitted sketches for murals planned for a public library [other sources say it was the post office] in Port Washington, New York; these murals were common WPA jobs during the late 1930s, but his work was rejected for its satirical look at the leisure habits of the affluent in America. He later completed paintings of *Aspects of Suburban Life: Main Street* and *Aspects of Suburban Life: Golf*. (See these images at end of this document.) Like most of his work, the paintings quickly wound up in private collections. He signed with the prestigious Midtown Galleries on Madison Avenue and 57th Street, and his 1937 show receive a stunning seven thousand visitors.”
Paul Cadmus, Encyclopedia of World Biography, www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Cadmus-Paul.html.
8. Cadmus’s close friends were photographer George Platt Lynes; artist Jared French; his brother-in-law Lincoln Kirstein, the general director of the New York City Ballet (and one of the WWII Monuments Men); dancer George Balanchine; and the writers E. M. Forster, W. H. Auden, and Christopher Isherwood.
9. “I’m called a realist painter, yet I don’t know how realistic I am---sometimes magic realist, sometimes symbolic realist, in any case always representational. I want people to know what I’m saying.” Cadmus, quoted in Lincoln Kirstein’s, *Paul Cadmus*, 1992.
10. “I did these two paintings and *The Fleet’s In!* was chosen as one of the paintings to be sent to an exhibition of the WPA [PWAP] paintings at the Corcoran in Washington. That’s when I got my start. That’s when the Admiral made the fuss -- when the exhibition opened. Fortunately, I had had the painting photographed before it was sent down, so I was able to give photographs to the press when they came to see me when the scandal broke. So I was all on the front pages and that was the best piece of luck an artist could ever have had. Fortunately, I was able to back it up later on with paintings that

were not inferior, let's say...*The Fleet's In!* didn't seem [controversial] to me at all. No more controversial than the *Shore Leave* one, which I had done. It hadn't been exhibited, of course, but I just thought it was an aspect of daily life that I had seen. Absolutely truthful, I thought....Perhaps I made the people uglier than they were, and I certainly probably put them into tighter clothes than they sometimes wore....I did get threats on the phone too, people going to come and beat me up -- sailors and things like that. For a little while, I kind of hid. I didn't go to my apartment. I stayed at my aunt's apartment for a few days. I didn't realize how important it was for my further career....I showed what they thought was a disgraceful aspect of our Armed Forces. I mean the sailors were human beings who went around with prostitutes and behaved drunkenly, and they didn't want that mentioned. They only wanted them known as heroes and -- well, goody-goodies is what they wanted sailors to be. Which they're not. I mean they weren't in those days, anyway."

"Oral history interview with Paul Cadmus, 1988." Archives of American Art. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-paul-cadmus-12619>

11. Henry McBride, art critic: "Paul Cadmus is a contemporary Hogarth and an artist whose work is not cluttered up with refinement."
12. After WWII, Cadmus's popularity diminished as abstract painting gained traction.
13. In the 1940's Cadmus began using egg tempera, "a painstaking method that dated back to the Renaissance era, and it sometimes took him six months to finish a single painting. Until the late '80's Cadmus produced one or two paintings a year..." www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Cadmus-Paul.html.
14. By 1970's his art was celebrated by the gay community. ([Legendary gay Artist - Paul Cadmus](http://www.gaypaintings.com/magazine/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2) <http://www.gaypaintings.com/magazine/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2>)
15. From the late '60's Cadmus lived with his partner Jon Andersson, a former cabaret singer and the subject of many of Cadmus's later paintings. In 1999 Cadmus died a few days before his 95th birthday. www.notablebiographies.com/supp/Supplement-Ca-Fi/Cadmus-Paul.html.



The Fleet's In!



Influence of Renaissance artists in Cadmus's delineation of the human figure in *Bicyclists* (left) and *Juan* (right).



Aspects of Suburban Life: Public Dock



Aspects of Suburban Life: Polo



Aspects of Suburban Life: Golf

Additional sources

http://www.all-art.org/art_20th_century/cadmus1.html

<http://www.queer-arts.org/archive/9809/cadmus/cadmus.html>

<http://www.history.navy.mil/ac/cadmus/cadmus.htm>

http://www.dcmooregallery.com/Cadmus_Biography_DCMoore.pdf