

## Miklos Suba - "Court Street, Brooklyn" 1934

Miklos Suba was born in Szatmar, Hungary in 1880. He was educated in architecture at the Royal Hungarian Technical University of Budapest in 1902. He also studied painting at the Vienna Academy in Austria and traveled/painted throughout England, France, Holland and Italy. He immigrated to United States from Hungary in 1924 at the age of 44 and resided with his wife May and his daughter Susanne at several different addresses in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights. After coming to United States he devoted his time exclusively to painting. Suba's adopted city impacted his shift in painting style from countrysides and landscapes to industrial subject matter. The exact rendering of buildings with clean lines and exact detail caused him to be grouped with Precisionist artists. Precisionism, also known as Cubist Realism, was a strictly American artistic movement that emerged after World War I and was at its height during the inter-War period. Its main themes included industrialization and the modernization of the American landscape, which were depicted in precise, sharply defined geometrical forms. The themes originated from the streamlined architecture and machinery of the early 1900s.

Suba restricted his paintings and drawings to areas within Brooklyn, often within walking distance of his residence. Suba had an intimate relationship with his Brooklyn; from its alleys and waterways to its storefronts and industrial plants as well as its views of Manhattan. Occasionally, he departed from his routine subject matter to others that fascinated him: barber shops, barber poles and cigar store Indians. The Brooklyn Historical Society has a collection of twelve scale model barbershop poles created by Suba. Included in the collection are sketches and working drawings for the models as well as maps that indicate where the poles were located. He incorporated barber poles in many of his paintings.

Upon first viewing the painting "Court Street, Brooklyn", one views a bustling city street with advertisement signs covering buildings. The work was created using oil paint on canvas with brushstrokes that are fine to nearly invisible. Crisp, vertical lines, distinct in the painting by moderate intensity color changes, define the three buildings. Rectangular shapes are repetitive throughout, seen in the windows and signs, as well as further defining the building shapes. Angular lines draw the observer's eye from the lower left corner down the sidewalk noting how bare the street and sidewalk seem in contrast to the advertisements on the buildings. Barber poles are present on the barber shop as is a clock that indicates the late afternoon time. The street life appears to be in a tranquil state just prior to the evening rush.

The painting, "Court Street, Brooklyn" was featured in the exhibit, "The Artist in New York" at the Museum of the City of New York in April of 1958. The painting was also featured in the article "The City Sits for its Portrait" in *The New York Times Magazine*, dated April 13, 1958. In 1958 the painting was part of Suzanne Suba's private collection.



It was noted that Suba rarely left his beloved Brooklyn during his twenty year residence. Miklos Suba died in July 18, 1944 after a brief illness and is buried next to his wife in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. He captured a Brooklyn that often no longer exists as it was seen through his own eyes. Brooklyn Heights was slowly becoming a modern transportation hub just prior to his death. The elevated train line from Manhattan to Brooklyn was torn down in 1940. Entire city blocks were razed through 1950-1960 to create Cadman Plaza, which resulted in the creation of several underground subway stations opening in 1948 as well as the building of Kings County Courthouse in 1958. The Brooklyn Queen's Expressway (BQE) under the design of Robert Moses nearly destroyed the historical neighborhood of Brooklyn Heights however the community developed a "Citizen Alternative Plan" which saved the neighborhood. The contested section of the BQE, opened in 1954, skirts the neighborhood and hugs the shoreline. It also resulted in the creation of the public Promenade which views lower Manhattan.

The painting "Court Street, Brooklyn" reminds me of my time in Brooklyn Heights which I called home for two years. It bought back the feelings of the busy street, the hustle and bustle - always surrounded by people but never interacting. I always wanted to stop, look up and observe the buildings that surrounded me, but I was usually in such a rush to get where I was going that the time was never taken.

Unbeknownst to me, I walked by this address, 80 Court Street, 2 times a day at a minimum, taking my daughter to preschool. Two of the three buildings in the painting are still standing with only minor structural changes. Unfortunately, the barber shop has been torn down and in its place is a McDonald's restaurant. The passage of time will continue and only upon reflection will we see how much Suba's adopted home has changed.



Amy Doyle  
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