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Peter Blume's *The Rock* (1944–48) and the Post-war Landscape

Cécile Whiting♦

Peter Blume's *The Rock*, a painting that preoccupied the artist for the duration of the war (although he did not complete it until 1948), combines evidence of death and destruction alongside signs of renewal in a panoramic landscape



Fig.1: Peter Blume, *The Rock*, 1944-1948, 57 5/8" x 74 3/8", The Art Institute of Chicago. © 2020 The Educational Alliance, Inc. / Estate of Peter Blume / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

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spanning from Europe on the right to the United States on the left (fig. 1). This painting resulted from the artist's struggle throughout the 1940s to paint a major statement about the predicament of the world in light of unfolding events of World War Two, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the horrifying revelations about the Nazi concentration camps, and post-war concerns about the global environment. The exhibit of *The Rock* in 1949 at the Durlacher Gallery in New York to resoundingly positive critical acclaim and its presentation the following year at the Carnegie International Exhibition where it was voted the best picture in the show by visitors, coincided with a period when the United States undertook efforts to expand and consolidate its political, economic, and cultural power in the dawning days of the Cold War. In tune with a future-oriented ethos of that time, *The Rock* acknowledged destruction in the past but nevertheless held out hope for what lay ahead by reasserting the possibility of rebuilding through human cooperation. From the perspective of today, when greenhouse gases spew into the atmosphere, when humans engage in innumerable conflicts over land, shrinking resources, and religious and ethnic differences, and when a pandemic brings society to a grinding halt, *The Rock* may seem hopelessly naïve about the possibility of reconstruction and human cooperation. This article examines how Blume's painting spoke to an emergent global consciousness that in its most idealistic, liberal-humanist form presaged a future of human cooperation, but that in its most crass form eventually led to the development of global commercial networks and the exhaustion of natural resources.

Blume, while supporting many political causes in the 1930s and 1940s including the fight against fascism, steered an independent course when it came to aesthetics. Several European Surrealists, including André Breton, eyed Blume as one of their own, but the American never joined a group or artistic movement. Nonetheless his paintings, with their meticulously delineated scenes containing multiple oddities, were understood as Surrealist by most American critics (Cozzolino, 2014: 24-25). At the same time, several of his most famous paintings also resonated with political issues of the day. For instance, his painting, *Eternal City* (1934–37), which featured an acrid green head of Mussolini popping out of the Roman Forum, generated a great deal of controversy in the late 1930s about the relationship between its detailed style and anti-fascist politics. In spite of such controversy—or perhaps because of it—*Eternal City* was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in 1942 (Whiting, 1989: 54-64; Cortesini, 2014: 59). Much more so than *Eternal City*, *The Rock* met with acclaim when it was seen, and it eventually found a permanent home in 1956 at the Art Institute of Chicago. Although Blume, like many American realists, generally fell out of favor in the post-war era, he has more recently enjoyed greater visibility thanks to a prominent retrospective exhibition in 2014 with an accompanying catalogue, *Peter Blume: Nature and Metamorphosis,* that carefully examined his paintings, biography, and historical context. This essay builds on that scholarship to tease out the many layers of political meaning in *The Rock* in the late 1940s.

The Rock adopted a landscape format that had long been identified with a national American project of westward expansion. In the first serious studies of American landscape painting, written by Wolfgang Born in 1948 and appearing in his book *American Landscape Painting* and his article of 1948 "The Panoramic Landscape as an American Art Form," the author identified the panorama as the appropriate means to capture the expansive space and beauty of American nature. He specifically linked the panoramic landscape, in which the viewer scanned the landscape and peered towards distant vanishing points, with the project of westward expansion (Born, 1948: 4). Indeed some nineteenth century panoramas such as Currier and Ives's *Across the Continent, Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way* of 1868 (a lithograph based on a painting by Frances Palmer, which Born reproduced in his book) made this connection explicit by situating a narrative about American Manifest Destiny within a broad geographic sweep. While Blume's painting is not panoramic in the same way—the picture is only a bit wider in relation to its height, and although its scene is organized laterally, its center is filled by a large object—*The Rock* achieves a sense of expansiveness through thematic rather than compositional means. With an American building being erected to the left and European ruins to the right (I'll be looking at these structures more closely later in the article), Blume's painting proffers a swathe of geography extending across continents.

Blume was not alone among artists in striving to rework and expand the legacy of the American panorama to encompass a new international world order. Surprisingly, even Regionalist artists John Steuart Curry and Thomas Hart Benton, among the most nativist painters in the 1930s, adopted panoramic vision to situate the American heartland in international events. Curry's *The Light of the World* appeared in color in *Esquire* magazine as a four-sheet foldout just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor (fig. 2). Characterized by the magazine as "the personification of this moment of our world-in-storm," the grand horizontal sweep of the canvas splits down the middle, presenting America on the left and the international threat on the right. With church, red barn, and farmhouse joined with skyscrapers, Curry conflates the Midwest



Fig.2: John S. Curry, *Light of the World*, published in Esquire, December 1941. Courtesy John Steuart Curry Estate & Keichel Fine Art, Lincoln NE.

with Manhattan and has farmers, women, and children huddled together with businessmen in the harbor watching a storm brewing across the ocean, presumably the war in Europe. Stretching the landscape horizontally as if the actual physical size of the canvas had to project the distance between the eastern seaboard of the United States and the impending European tempest, Curry's image exceeds the borders of both the nation and the magazine page.

Curry's use of a wide-angle perspective to intertwine the United States and the world beyond it found its echo in Benton's much more explicitly propagandistic series of eight paintings entitled *The Year of Peril,* completed in 1942. First exhibited at the Associated American Artists Gallery in New York in April of 1942, the series was reproduced in a booklet by Abbott Laboratories, an international pharmaceutical firm based in Chicago; it was also featured in a newsreel released by Paramount Pictures in April 1942. Taken as a set, Benton's paintings formulate a narrative vividly presenting the gore and violence of war, the evil nature of the fascists, and, in two of the paintings, the threat of fascism to a vulnerable and sleepy Midwest.

Invasion, the second largest canvas in the series, depicts a heartland overrun by the invading enemy (fig. 3). In this painting fascist soldiers overrun a great slice of the country from shining sea to amber waves of grain. Benton relies on a wide-angle perspective, reminiscent of Curry's *The Light of the World*, to capture a sweeping view of the United States. Also like Curry, he represents the United States as both the eastern seaboard and the Midwest, both the city and the country. However, Benton



Fig. 3: Thomas Hart Benton, *Invasion from the Year of Peril*, 1942, The State Historical Society of Missouri. © 2020 T. H. and R. P. Benton Testamentary Trusts / UMB Bank Trustee / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

replaces Curry's impending storm with actual ships arriving from Europe on the right. The invaders, personified as dark-skinned, simian monsters, make their way through the city—it is New York for we see the outline of the Empire State Building among other skyscrapers—and out across the countryside with their tanks. There, among the haystacks, farms, and green hills, enemy soldiers attack a rural family. Liquor bottle and weapons in hand, they destroy the land, rape a woman, mutilate children, and ram a bayonet down the throat of a farmer. In this picture the war has moved from across the ocean in Europe and escalated into a full-scale invasion of the heartland. The fascist attack convulses the Midwestern landscape, like the tornado in the *Wizard of Oz* that sweeps up Dorothy's farmhouse from its flat Kansas plain. The foreground in Benton's canvas tips up, catapulting all the figures across it. Benton combines the regional and the international in a stretch from background depth to foreground climax where the agrarian ideal is upended, literally and figuratively.

Rather than depicting the inhabitants of the New World as rightful colonizers moving westward through pristine nature, Benton and Curry picture them as vulnerable citizens witnessing the force of evil arriving from across the Atlantic Ocean. Yet in their efforts to visualize the relation between the United States and Europe across the sweep of the Atlantic ocean, Benton's and Curry's paintings relied on what emerged during this world war as a somewhat dated way of conceiving the relation between nations from the perspective of the land. During World War Two cartographers stepped in to picture the new realities of space and time ushered in by what was then called "air age geography." When in 1944 geographer Walter W. Ristow summarized the basic principles of the nascent practice, he began with the assertion that "air age geography is global geography" and went on to explain that "a world wide war and long-range aircraft have finally brought general acceptance of the fundamental fact that we inhabit a globe" (Ristow, 1944: 333). With modern aircraft sweeping across natural and political barriers, new maps measured distances by minutes not miles; while directional arrows and lines not constrained by the grid of latitude and longitude accentuated proximities, interconnections, and entanglements. Richard Edes Harrison, who during the war produced many striking maps for *Fortune* magazine as well as several atlases, was perhaps the most well-known and influential cartographer of the day. One of Harrison's most famous maps *One World, One War* from August 1941 orients the globe around the North Pole, thereby demonstrating how near the continental United States was to the land masses of Eurasia where war raged. As scholar Susan Schulten has pointed out, this particular map hung in many American homes, and served as the frontispiece to a contemporary geography textbook for children (Schulten, 1998: 177). The notion of proximity conveyed in Harrison's maps was underscored in the opening text to *A War Atlas for Americans* published in 1944: "No place on the globe is more than 60 hours flying time from any American city" (Office of War Information, 1944: np).

An exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art opening in August 1943, *Airways to Peace*, recognized the decisive shift in the geographical imagination ushered in by aerial warfare. Richard Edes Harrison was the chief consultant cartographer, while Wendell Willkie provided the political vision in the opening text of the catalogue and in all but one of the panels for the six sections of the exhibit. Willkie, the Republican nominee for President in 1940, enjoyed widespread fame in 1943 because of the publication that year of his book entitled *One World*. Written after Willkie's forty-nine day trip in a four-engine bomber around the world the previous year—through South America, Africa, the Middle East, Russia, and China-—the book sold over three million copies and was translated into many languages. In his recent biography of Willkie, David Levering Lewis maintains that it was "the most influential book published in the United States during World War II" (Lewis, 2018: 281). Willkie, announcing "there are no distant points in the world any longer," anticipated a new era of unity at the end of the war that would transcend narrow nationalisms and draw together people of different races and ethnicities from around the globe. Echoing the ideas from *One World*, Willkie reiterated in the *Airways to Peace* catalog that the world in the age of flight was a small and interdependent sphere.

During the war the globe replaced the map as the preferred means of visualizing geography and defining proximity. The *Airways to Peace* exhibit, which began with a section devoted to the history of maps, juxtaposed a Mercator projection against a globe, warning that the former generated "dangerously misleading" conceptions of distance that a globe could correct. Together, an eleven-foot polar projection defining major air routes and many examples of globes, illustrated the new geographical orientation of the moment. As Wilkie pronounced in the catalog: "The course over the top of the world is now clearly the shortest and the speediest way to friend and enemy alike" (MoMA, 1943: 4). Globes miniaturize the world, and invite viewers to spin them on axis in order to study land and sea from various angles. The most famous globe in this section of the exhibit, an enormous 50-inch globe lent by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, went even further in offering a mobile aerial perspective. Prepared by the Map Division of the Office of Strategic Services and presented by the United States Army to the President, this globe was the largest of its kind and included more geographic details than most. Most important, it rested on a special steel base with rubber bearings enabling it to be swiveled in any direction. The visitor to the exhibit was made to understand that the President, in manipulating the globe, adopted a mobile perspective, viewing geographical relationships from new and changing angles, all as part of fighting the war strategically.

Blume's *The Rock* features a globe of sorts right in the middle of its panoramic landscape. This blasted rock—moss-covered on the outside, bloody red and fissured on the inside—sits on a brown slab, itself resting on a natural pedestal of dirt and slabs of stone. An animal skeleton, flowering fungus and a dead tree stump and branch lie in front of the rock, while a young woman kneels below it with her arms upraised, grasping at dirt and a root. The broken sphere blocks our view down the

center of the picture, contravening the conventions of a Claudian landscape in which a horizontal topographical feature such as a river or path winding through the middle of the scene leads the eye back into depth. Rather than creating a view to be scanned in breadth and depth typical of the panoramic landscape, Blume focuses our attention on the large rock, which—if regarded in its spherical character as an allegory of the globe—has the effect of placing the entire world at the very center of a local setting.

Is the rock indeed a miniature version of the earth, scourged by war? In numerous interviews and letters Blume maintained that: "the bloody rock […] goes back to the world being shattered and smashed" (Trapp, 1983: 27). The broken rock resonates with many a science-fiction tale from World War Two in which the earth destroyed by war is characterized as a terrible, gashed boulder, desolate and empty of life. For instance, Arthur Clarke's *The Rescue Party* of 1946 describes a "ruined land," "a waste of barren rock" (Clarke, 1946: 36-60).

In addition to playing the role of a ravaged planet Earth, Blume's rock could also be interpreted as an agent of destruction, a meteor fallen to earth. In the 1940s and early 1950s, however, the real threat perceived to be potentially dropping from the sky was nuclear weapons, not rocks. One clear expression of this fear was a nine-minute film, *One World or None*, produced one year after the end of World War Two by the National Committee on Atomic Information with technical assistance from the Federation of American Scientists and based on a bestselling book of essays by the same title written by leading nuclear scientists. The meaning of the title, a play on Willkie's *One World*, is brought into view in the film's opening sequence where we see a spinning globe destroyed by a bomb. Blume's rock understood as a miniature earth recognizes not only the shift in the geographical imagination from the seaman's map to air-age geography but also the state of the world, broken apart by war and threatened by the bomb.

In the immediate post-war era, some warned, however, that the greatest threat to the planet was not the bomb but rather human exploitation of the environment. In his bestselling book of 1948 *Our Plundered Planet*, Fairfield Osborn opened with a dire warning:

> The other war, the silent war, eventually the most deadly war, was one in which man has indulged for a long time, blindly and unknowingly. This other world-wide war, still continuing, is bringing more widespread distress to the human race than any that has resulted from armed conflict. It contains potentialities of ultimate disaster greater even than would follow the misuse of atomic power. This other war is man's conflict with nature (Osborn, 1948: vii).

The human impulse to dominate and damage the surrounding environment, according to Osborn, upset an interdependent ecosystem, threatening nature

and humans alike. As historian Thomas Robertson argues, Osborn's book, which warned about overpopulation, overconsumption, and environmental degradation, challenged the growth-based economic models then reshaping both the American and global landscapes (Robertson, 2012: 338).

Does the young woman kneeling below the rock worship a false god, a golden calf, or does she raise her arms in despair about the fate of the earth? Her subordinate position, grasping at dirt, craning her neck to see over a ledge above her, places her in a very different relation to the earth than, say, President Roosevelt photographed with his 50-inch globe (fig. 4). The president is seen leaning from his seat behind his desk in the Oval Office to peer at the continents of Europe and Africa; he exudes serious interest and command over the globe. Cementing a sense of the President's resolve, an American flag hovers behind the globe while a telephone sits on his desk, ready to convey his orders. Where he looks over and commands, the young woman in Blume's painting peers upwards, desperate and unknowing. She lacks the understanding of the continents, indeed delight, of the fresh-faced and smiling boy seen in the frontispiece to a geography textbook from 1944 (fig. 5). This teen holds his Harrison map *One World, One War* open with the continents spread out before him, contained between his outstretched hands. In both of these photographs, of the president and the boy, omniscient aerial vision promises understanding and command over global relations. In Blume's painting, in contrast, the globe has burst apart, losing the wholeness and coherence



Fig.4: President Roosevelt with 50" globe in Oval Office, 1942, Courtesy of George C. Marshall Research Library/ Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum.

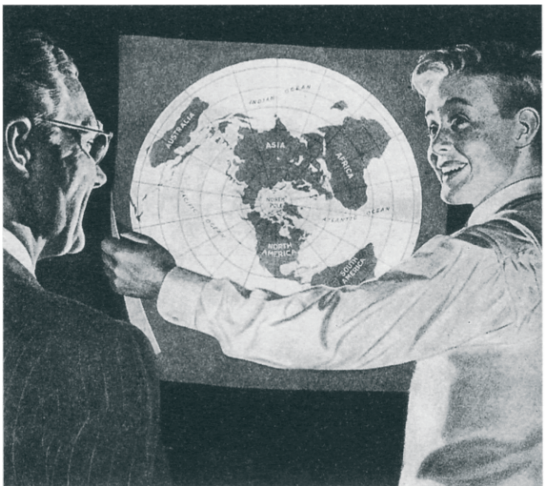


Fig.5: Frontispiece, *Our Air-Age World*: *a textbook in global geography* by Leonard O. Packard, Bruce Overton and Ben D. Wood (New York: Macmillan Co., 1944)

of a globe viewed from above. The young woman below cannot see the rock in its entirety, let alone save it from its terrible fate.

Yet the viewers of the painting fare better in their understanding of the rock than the young woman tucked below it. The viewer is at a remove, in a position more akin to Roosevelt's or the boy with the atlas. The viewer can see, in addition to destruction, evidence of renewal, beyond the globe itself to which the young woman devotes her exclusive attention. Enormous bright red flowers sprout from the fungus and surround the dead tree limb adjacent to the animal skeleton on the ledge upon which the rock rests on the side away from the young woman.

It is true that the scarlet fungus, mutant in size, could be hinting at a future gone awry in the manner of science fiction of the day in which scant resources and monstrous births become the norm after the destruction of earth. Yet such an allusion to a dystopian outcome is bracketed, as it were, within a narrative of reconstruction whereby the right side of the picture depicts a redbrick building in ruins, while the left side offers the promise of fresh reconstruction, both literal and figurative.
The charred timber, still smoldering fire, and billowing smoke engulfing the ruins of the redbrick building were apparently triggered by photographs of houses bombed in the London Blitz. As Blume explained in an interview, "That was based on the Blitz period when London was being destroyed and the bombs kept shearing a house right down the middle and leaving everything there, the rocking chair and everything else" (Trapp, 1983: 26). Blume had portrayed a blasted redbrick building consumed



Fig.6: Peter Blume, *Fracture Ward*, 1944, 24 1/8" x 36 ¼", U.S. Army Center for Military History. © 2020 The Educational Alliance, Inc. / Estate of Peter Blume / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

by black smoke in the corner of a previous painting, *Fracture Ward* of 1944 (fig. 6). Indeed, on numerous occasions Blume claimed that the ruins in *Fracture Ward* were inspired by photographs of London after the Blitz (Trapp, 1983: 37). *Fracture Ward* depicts the new penicillin ward of the Army Medical Corps at Halloran Military Hospital on Staten Island. Fittingly, the painting was commissioned by the pharmaceutical company Abbott Laboratories. The scene itself is reassuringly clean, even homey. Yet the image of the destroyed building in the lower left intrudes into this otherwise safe hospital ward, reminding us—like the broken rock in Blume's later canvas—of a global war occurring elsewhere. Penicillin cannot protect these soldiers from the violence of combat, where their bodies are broken like the building. Meanwhile, the traction frames, ambiguously, anticipate both the fractured timbers at the right of *The Rock* and the construction scaffolding at its left. The ruins in *The Rock* assume a more prominent position than they did in *Fracture Ward*, and, no longer functioning as a picture within a picture, body forth as a real part of the landscape, here and now. With fire still burning and the smoke billowing, the bombed building to the right testifies that needless destruction of the earth continues into the present.

The new building to the left, with its distinctive chimney, evokes the modernist, sensibility of Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater of 1935, a building certainly on the mind of the painter. In 1938 the owner of this architectural masterpiece, Edgar J. Kaufmann, commissioned Blume to depict his newly completed home. Blume quickly finished a ten by fourteen inch oil but was stymied by the task of enlarging it to five by seven feet (Cozzolino, 2014: 86). After a long, tortuous struggle, Blume gave up on this project in 1940, only to return to it nearly two decades later. In the meantime, Wright's iconic building snuck its way into *The Rock*. Blume even claimed at times that the rock quarry and the ruined building in the painting had been inspired by a site near Fallingwater (Trapp, 1987: 3). Appropriately, Kaufmann purchased *The Rock*, settling for this rendition of his home under construction rather than a rendition of the completed house on its own. Here the modernist structure is the not-yet-realized antidote to the destruction of buildings that it mirrors across the dominant central rock. Its future completion promises a finished home built out of the remnants of war—a future new building, perhaps even a new world, beyond the chaos of war and environmental degradation.

The laboring bodies of the workers gathered toward the left side of *The Rock* create a narrative arc of renewal from the ruins in the right background, looping beneath the blasted rock at center to lead back to the construction site in the left background. All of the figures in the scene are busy, ignoring the rock and the girl. These men (and one small woman at the base of the construction site), white and black striving together, recall the mixed-race group in *Fracture Ward.* A hope for peaceful coexistence between races echoes between the two paintings.

When *The Rock* was first exhibited in 1949 at the The Durlacher Gallery in New York, it appeared with 97 preparatory drawings and a number of related paintings,

one of which was *Fracture Ward*. Included as well were all four paintings completed immediately after a trip to Key West in 1940, where Blume had retreated following the foundering of the Fallingwater project. Blume acknowledged the relationship of one of these Key West paintings, *The Buoy*, to *The Rock* in an undated letter to James Thrall Soby, curator at MoMA (fig. 7). Blume honed in on a particular detail of the smaller painting: "The rough encrusted sphere with sadistic lacerations [of *The Buoy*] is broken apart in *The Rock*. The broken sphere […] the rock is at once jagged stone and bleeding flesh" (Soby, n.d.: n.p.). When he painted *The Buoy*, Blume decided to highlight one moment in a cycle of destruction and renewal of the buoys he witnessed in Key West: "They were painted a red, brilliant red […] they brought these things out [of the water] and they were all covered with […] all sorts of incrustations of various kinds […] and then they scraped them off and then repainted them" (Trapp, 1983: 24). Though fascinated with the entire life cycle of these floats, Blume in *The Buoy* obsessed over the object in its most battered state. He also made it monstrously



Fig. 7: Peter Blume, *The Buoy*, 1941, 16" x 18 1/8", The Art Institute of Chicago. © 2020 The Educational Alliance, Inc. / Estate of Peter Blume / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.

large, indeed global, by dropping his point of view quite close to the ground. Time and again, in interviews and in letters, Blume associated the buoy he depicted with the global war. In a letter to art historian Frank Trapp he wrote, "I saw the buoy as an image of the earth lacerated by the war" (Trapp, 1983: 25). In *The Rock*, Blume took the deterioration of the buoy on its exterior one step further by shattering the sphere. However, he also pulled back from the prone position—that viewpoint is assigned to the young woman—and framed the broken, fissured rock-as-world within a larger depiction of destruction and renewal.

When *The Rock* was exhibited it received an enormous amount of positive press. Critics repeatedly acknowledged resonances between the painting and the current state of the world while nevertheless finding in the painting a hopeful vision of the future. For instance, John O'Connor, Associate Director of Fine Arts at the Carnegie Institute, wrote in the *Carnegie Magazine:*

> The painting symbolizes according to the artist the continual process of man's rebuilding out of a devastated world. One account has it that the shattered blood red rock represents the world today, surrounded by symbols of destruction: skeletons, blasted trees, burning debris and the crumbling edifices of man. But at the same time there is a note of hope in Blume's world where life blooms even in the midst of decay. A scarlet fungus grows full blown out of a dead and rotten stump, people feverishly grovel in the ruins, building for themselves a new and better world… (O'Connor, 1951: 13-14).

The critical celebration of *The Rock* at the end of the decade of the 1940s coincided with a period of re-engagement by the United States in foreign affairs. At the war's end, isolationist sentiment had re-emerged as the country focused its attention on the return of troops and the stabilization and growth of the domestic economy. However, the bleak state of Europe, especially after the harsh winter of 1946–47, lent a sense of urgency to talk in the United States about helping Europe. The Marshall Plan passed by Congress and signed by President Harry Truman in 1948, marked a conscious effort by the federal government to intervene in world affairs and to help repair western European countries whose cities, transportation networks, and industries had been devastated and whose people had been killed and displaced by war.

In Blume's painting, the interlocking people of diverse races working together to create a new building—and, by extension, a new world—would seem to partake in the most idealistic sentiments about global engagement and future peace expressed during the war and post-war period. In 1943 Willkie had called for "one world" (thus the title of his book) in which human conflict and inequality would be eliminated both within the United States and beyond its borders. In a similar spirit,

the United Nations was organized around lofty principles of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among member states. Indeed, the emblem designed for the United Nations in 1945 shows a map centered on the North Pole—surely inspired by Harrison—contained by two olive wreathes reaching like arms to embrace a peaceful world (Barney, 2015:36). Blume's vision of men and women of different races striving in concert to build a house gives visual form to the most hopeful and idealistic strains of post-war planning, even as it recalls the destruction of war only recently brought to an end.

In Blume's future world, manual labor of integrated and cooperative workers even trumps modern commerce: note the tin Coca Cola sign among the debris on the right side of the painting. Although the Coca Cola Corporation undertook its first efforts to establish itself in a global market in the 1920s and during World War Two shipped coke to military bases around the world, its global dominance would only emerge after the war, something that Henry Luce's *Time* magazine celebrated with a cover of 1950 in which the globe, embraced by two arms extending from a head in the form of a Coke bottlecap, drinks a coke out of a bottle.

Indeed global commerce was anticipated by the American business community during the war and long before the triumph of Coke; this vision of the future celebrated unity not through manual labor but through an exchange of goods facilitated by telecommunication. Another Luce publication, the business magazine *Fortune* forecast a world interconnected by technology and commerce before the war ended. The cover of *Fortune* from May 1944 designed by Peter Piening accentuates a dense network connecting both sides of the globe. Inside the magazine, articles emphasized the need to plan for a future global economy by consolidating international communications and securing trade relations. In a similar spirit, a map designed by Harrison for IT&T published in *Fortune* in September of 1945 highlighted the systems of communication controlled by IT&T connecting San Francisco and New York to other hubs around the world. These are images stressing proximity not in order to point to America's vulnerability to the enemy but instead to champion America's anticipated global economic dominance. They visualize nothing less than the global expansion of American corporate capitalism as explicitly articulated in Henry Luce's editorial, "This American Century," published in *Life* in 1941.

Even Blume's painting contains a reassertion of the central place of the United States in the global arena. While the large bleeding rock fills the center of the landscape and blocks an imagined trajectory into depth, the framing device of the buildings on either side of the rock serve to define a panorama viewed from a place. To the extent that the redbrick building in ruins on the right in *The Rock* evokes the London Blitz and the modern building under construction on the left recalls Fallingwater, the narrative arc of the workers moves from the old world to the new. Ultimately in this painting, the United States contains and rebuilds the

world. Completed after hostilities ceased, the figures in Blume's *The Rock* seem to offer a more hopeful message about peoples and nations cooperating to reconstruct a broken world under the aegis of a newly empowered and modern, future-oriented United States.

Viewers now look back on *The Rock* from a perspective of nearly three-quarters of a century, a perspective from which so many aspects of Blume's liberal-humanist vision of cooperation and reconstruction conveyed by the painting seem hopelessly outdated. Rather than a newly constructed world overcoming destruction of the planet, new forms of annihilation unleashed by the triumph of global commerce have undercut the possibility of renewal and rebirth offered by Blume. While in retrospect Blume's optimism in an emerging American-led new world order may appear overly optimistic, if not downright problematic, surely too some of us may regret that aspect of Blume's moment that gave him and his audience grounds for hope.

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