

Now, it is prudent to give some contextualization of my object. Firstly, *The Joy of Living* appears to be a lesser known work of Stella's. As such, there was a dearth of information on both the study of the paintings and the paintings themselves. Even so, a contextualization of Stella's life and his trajectory as an artist can provide a helpful lens into interpreting his work. Firstly, Joseph Stella was born in 1877 in a small mountain village in Italy called Muro Lucano. He would immigrate to New York at eighteen years old. In New York he studied art and the primary technique he learned was Realism. However, after a trip to Europe, from 1902-1909, Stella was exposed to the Avant-Garde movements of Cubism and Futurism (Cassidy, 1997: 40). Even so, Stella worked at a time of intense xenophobia and nativism. His status as an immigrant during this time compelled Stella to construct an explicitly American identity. He looked towards past American culture and especially took inspiration from the works of the 19th-century poet Walt Whitman (Cassidy 1997: 56). His focus on New York City, in the period of 1913 to 1922, further solidified Stella's efforts to forge an American identity. While Stella depicted the city through the European idioms of Cubism and Futurism, he still focused on the ideology of America as a symbol of opportunity and modernity.

Although scholars often characterize Stella as a Futurist artist, his works followed a complex and contradictory trajectory which often eluded labels. Indeed, after 1922, he started to move away from the traditional Futurist image of the machine and city. He did, however, continue to conform to Futurist aesthetics (Blandino 2013: 180). For instance, his paintings continued to utilize uniform and rigidly controlled lines to allude to metal. Also significant during this period was that Stella began to reassert his identity as an Italian more strongly. This is not to say, however, that he did not continue to identify as an American. Even so, in about 1926 - the year Stella became an American citizen - he wrote a letter that made explicit his Italian identity and background. In it, Stella stated, "Italy is truly my only inspiration. The artist is like the tree, aging, he bends under the fruits, endlessly making himself closer to the maternal womb that had generated him. Despite everything, thirty or more years in America was not able to make less strong and decisive my latin ties" (Appella 2015: 146)* Indeed, as the quote demonstrates, Joseph Stella began to look back to his country of origin as an important source of inspiration. For example, after 1926, he began to create works that featured heavily the countryside; thereby, he elevated to a more mythic status the character of his country of origin. *Study for The Joy of Living* - and the paintings it inspired - belong to his body of work which depicted the countryside, flora and fauna.

* Translation from "L'Italia è l'unica mia vera ispiratrice. L'artista è come l'albero: invecchiando, s'incurva sotto i frutti, si fa sempre più presso il grembo materno che lo ha generato. Malgrado tutto, trenta è più anni di America non sono riusciti che a rendere più compatta e decisa la mia compagine latina."